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"After thirty-five years, twenty of them spent at almost every kind of job you can think of, I went into the writing business. Spent most of my life in Chicago, moving to New York in 1950. In the past five years I've produced two children in collaboration with my wife, and 272 stories. Sold the entire production with the exception of the children. (I will not!)"

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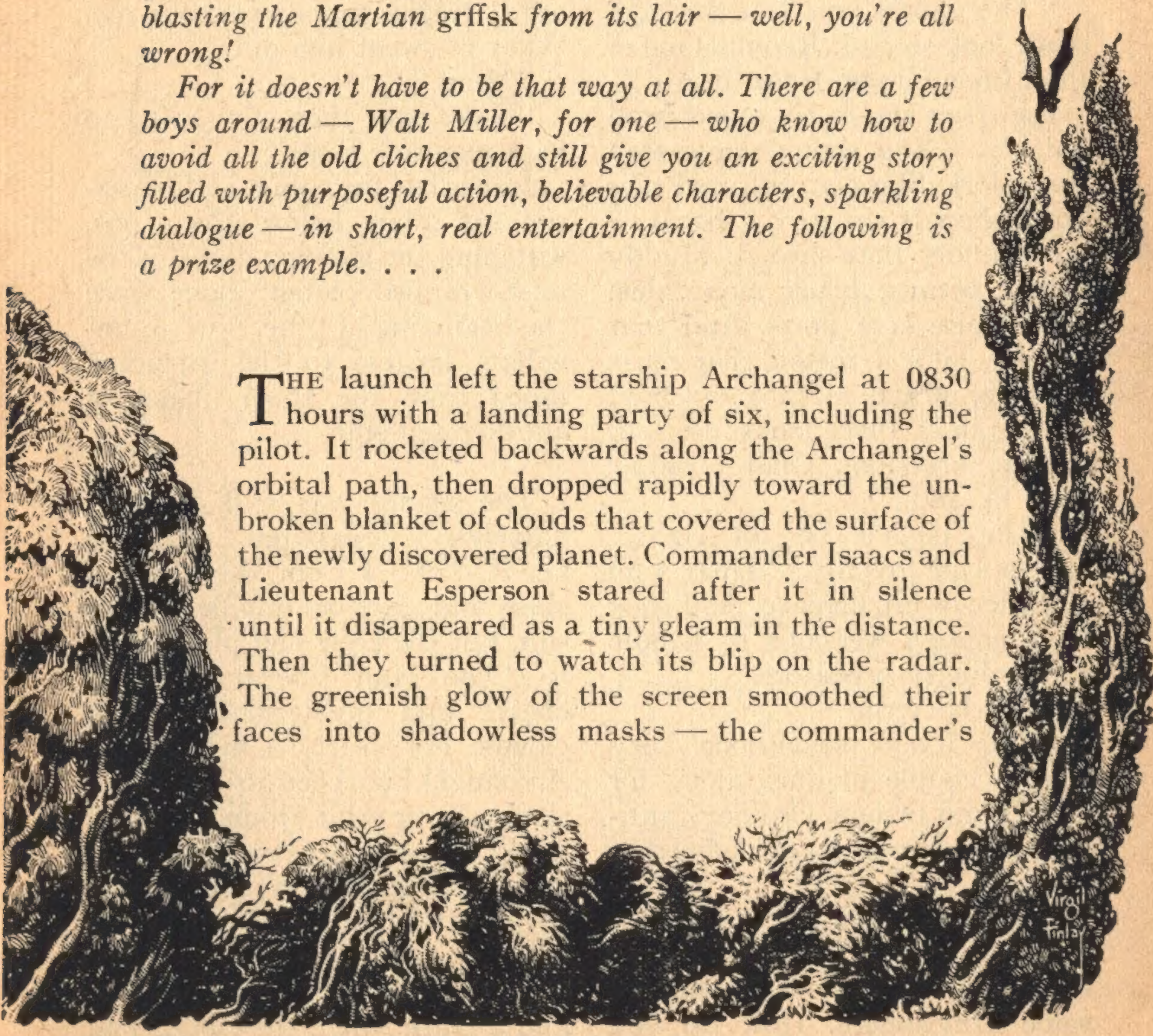
SIX *and* TEN *are* JOHNNY

By Walter M. Miller, Jr.

If you think science fiction consists solely of stories about lean and noble heroes, lovely blondes who scream well and show a lot of skin, humanoid natives of other planets who go about telepathing all over the purple landscape, ray guns blasting the Martian grffsk *from its lair — well, you're all wrong!*

For it doesn't have to be that way at all. There are a few boys around — Walt Miller, for one — who know how to avoid all the old cliches and still give you an exciting story filled with purposeful action, believable characters, sparkling dialogue — in short, real entertainment. The following is a prize example. . . .



THE launch left the starship Archangel at 0830 hours with a landing party of six, including the pilot. It rocketed backwards along the Archangel's orbital path, then dropped rapidly toward the unbroken blanket of clouds that covered the surface of the newly discovered planet. Commander Isaacs and Lieutenant Esperson stared after it in silence until it disappeared as a tiny gleam in the distance. Then they turned to watch its blip on the radar. The greenish glow of the screen smoothed their faces into shadowless masks — the commander's

expressionless, the lieutenant's glowering in thought.

As the launch's trace waned into insignificance, Isaacs glanced at Esperson with a faint smile.

"Worried?"

The lieutenant nodded.

"About what? The life forms?"

"Yeah. I had a close look at that jungle. I'd hate to sit down in the middle of it."

"The photos you brought back don't look so bad. Reminds me of the Matto Grosso from the air."

Esperson shook his blond head quickly. "You should have seen the colors, Skipper. Infrared pics don't show it the way I saw it — down under that shroud. Muddy yellow oceans, black mountains, dead white lava flows. And that jungle — it's a rotten chartreuse with big albino patches and livid streaks in it. Place looks infected, murky, brooding. Glad I didn't have to land."

"The boys'll be all right," Isaacs said jovially. "There's no evidence of intelligence. And they have enough weapons to handle any ordinary predators."

"But bacteria —"

"They'll take precautions. They took a couple of dogs along for testers and tasters. Ordinary antiseptic measures have sufficed in the past."

The communicator suddenly hummed, then spoke. "Isaacs from Launch One. We're hitting some atmosphere. How do you read me? Over."

The commander reached for a microphone. "This is Isaacs. Read you loud and clear, Rogan. Call every five minutes on the way down. If you can't land at the place we picked, give us the exact coordinates of a better spot and go on in. Over."

"Wilco and out."

Isaacs grinned at his lieutenant. "Rogan sounds nervous too. Want to sweat him out?"

"Yeah."

"Take over then. I'm going to log some sack time."

Isaacs left the cabin, and Esperson sat alone before the scope, watching the glowing globe of the mist-wrapped planet, alone since the beginning of time, now an unwilling hostess to the intruding biped from the third planet of another sun-star.

The planet was still officially nameless, designated only as G_oGC-2794-II from the spectral class and catalog number of its sun, but the crew had nicknamed it "The Nun" because of its chaste and mysterious veil of clouds. For nearly a month, the Archangel had been drifting in a sixteen-hour orbit around the new world, mapping its land masses by radar and sending launches down to penetrate the atmosphere for samples and close-up photographs of the surface. But it was hard to find a place where the clouds had

lifted enough to give a clear view of the land, even from an altitude of a thousand feet. After ten trips down in a launch — without actually landing — Esperson had managed to bring back a dozen passable photographs of scattered stretches of jungle. They had revealed nothing to suggest a civilized species. But Rod Esperson had a bad feeling about the place. The jungle seemed to billow and roll, but not in the way a wind would sway it.

"Isaacs from Launch One," blared the communicator.

Esperson reached for the mike. "The skipper went to bed, Hal. This is Rod. Go ahead."

"Hi, Pal. Nothing to report. Nothing but fog."

"Are you in it yet?"

"Just below us. We're well into the atmosphere though. Altitude twelve miles. Radar's picking up the plateau."

"Hope you can land there. Not another flat place like that in five hundred miles."

There was a brief pause, then: "I'm not particularly interested in landing at all, Rod. There's something about this place — Oh, never mind. Listen, are you going to hold that orbit?"

"I guess so. Your blast-off and interception calculations were based on our holding this course. The planet rotates in twenty hours; we go around in the same direction in sixteen hours. You'll lag behind us four and a half degrees per hour. We'll be on your horizon twenty hours from now, and we'll rise again in your west sixty hours from now. You can blast-off then and we'll rendezvous in eighty hours."

"Yeah, but I don't like that forty hours. You'll be below horizon, Rod. Can't you get in a twenty-hour orbit and stay right overhead, so we can keep in touch?"

"Sorry, Hal — there's satellite debris out there. Too much chance of getting clobbered by a half-mile hunk of rock. You'll have to spend forty hours on your own."

There was a long silence, then: "Roger and out."

Esperson waited, wondering if it wouldn't be better to risk ramming a satelloid and keep the landing launch in communicator-range. It had been Isaacs' decision to hold the present orbit. Esperson had wanted to risk the belt, maneuvering into it slowly, and mooring Archangel to the biggest satelloid near a twenty-hour orbit so as to stay with the natural drift of the debris. While they stayed with the drift, they would be reasonably safe; but getting in and out of the belt was dangerous business, and Isaacs had decided against it. He preferred leaving six men unprotected for forty hours to endangering the entire seventy-man crew of the Archangel.

Five minutes passed. Hal Rogan called again, reporting that the launch was now descending through the thick envelope of pea-soup. He laughed nervously. "Everybody's got a headache, Rod — all six of us. How about you? Did you get a sore skull when you came down here? Two guys are sick."

"You aren't breathing the atmosphere yet, are you? Lots of CO_2 in it. That might do it."

"No, we're still on the pressure cylinders. But everybody's got a headache. Did you get one?"

Rod paused. "Not that I noticed. But then — I've got a silver plate in my noodle, Hal. Fractured skull five years ago. I've adjusted to one continuous headache. Don't tell the skipper, though."

"Check. It may be that our air pumps are fouled up. I'll check it. Over and out."

It wouldn't be much longer now, Esperson thought. They would be landing on the low mesa and walking for the first time on the surface of the veiled Nun. And the mesa was now only a couple of hours east of the twilight line. Soon after landing, the clouds would darken, and starless night would fall over them.

They would be safe in the ship. Or would they? The small launch was considerably less massive than some of the reptilian brutes that Earth had invented during her Mesozoic era.

He gazed fixedly at his watch. The time came for another call. But the communicator remained silent. Fifteen seconds . . . thirty . . . forty-five . . .

Tensely anxious he keyed his mike. "Hal from Rod. Give me a call. Over."

Moments later the answer came. "Sorry, Rod. I was watching the radar. We're flying at five thousand feet. Where's the bottom of this soup?"

"Lying on the ground, maybe. If you don't break through, don't risk a radar landing."

"You don't have to beg me."

"How're the headaches?"

"Mine's about gone. Everybody's okay — so far."

"Try to stay that way. Keep in contact, will you? I like to know what's going on."

"I'll give you a running commentary: fog — fog — fog. Period."

Esperson waited, listening to an occasional blurt of static caused by solar activities. Two minutes passed.

"I think we're breaking through, Rod. It's thinning out a little. We're at fifteen hundred feet."

"Above what?"

"The plateau. There! I think now maybe —" His voice choked off for a moment. Harsh breathing in the microphone.

"What's wrong, Hal?"

The reply was low and tense.

"Jeeziss! The color of that jungle! Putrid-looking — everything is. You can almost smell the stink, just looking at it."

Rod nodded at the screen. "Yeah — it gave me the same kind of a bang. How's the mesa look?"

"Flat. Flat enough to land, damn it! We're going down now."

The launch pilot was keeping his microphone keyed. He turned up the audio-input, and Rod listened to the growl of the rockets as the launch nosed vertically upward and settled on its tripedal tail. The growl grew louder, then faded. There was a shuddering crash, then silence.

"Hal!"

"Yeah. Well, we're down."

"What do you see?"

"Vines, mostly. Whole mesa's covered with vines. We're about a hundred yards from the drop-off down to the jungle. And, I guess the mesa's about a hundred yards above the tree-tops — if you can call them trees."

"See any animals?"

"No — but Winters claims he saw something flying over the jungle. Nobody else saw it."

"Well, if you go outside, wear suits — until you see what happens to the dogs."

"Yeah, the boys are turning out the pups now. Seems to be a little commotion. Pups don't want to go."

"Place probably smells strange to them. That would do it."

"Well — listen, Rod. I'm going to get in a suit and lead the dogs outside. I'll take a remote unit with me and keep in touch with you."

"Be careful, Hal. Go armed."

"Six grenades, a rocket-lobber, and side-arms. How's that? I'll call back when I get outside. Over and out."

Rod took advantage of the break to rouse Isaacs on the interphone. The commander sputtered sleepy babble for a moment.

"They're down, Skipper. Want to talk to Rogan?"

"Uh, yeah, after a while. Any trouble?"

"Nothing but nerves so far. I'm worried about nightfall."

"They can stay in the launch after dark."

"Yeah — six steaks in a package."

"What?"

"Nothing. You coming down?"

"Be there in a minute."

Rod turned back to the communicator and waited. After three minutes, he tried a call. There was no answer. He began calling at thirty second intervals. Then Hal's carrier hummed, and he heard the dogs.

"Good Lord, Hal! What's wrong with the pups? Sound like they had their rumps painted with Tabasco sauce."

The launch-pilot's voice came

back angry and tremulous. "One of them damn near tore a rip in my suit. They've gone nuts, Rod. Trying to get back in the airlock. Jeez! Francey just tore a hunk out of Mutt's ear. *Listen* to that!"

The dogs were shrieking rather than howling. There was nothing mournful about their cries, but only hysterical fright or pain. He heard tearing and stumbling sounds, assumed they were caused by the dogs scrambling about in the vines.

"Hal?"

"Yeah?"

"It's probably the carbon dioxide. Content's probably high enough to cause delusions of suffocation, for a while anyway. Better stay away from them."

"You think I'm crazy?"

"Is everybody out of the ship?"

"Yeah. It's getting kind of dark. Winters is getting set up to take some pictures from the top of the cliff. Jameson is getting some soil samples. Richards is having a look at the plants that grow up here. But damn, Rod — it all looks like one big plant to me. Everything looks like it's joined together. Vines grow right over the side of the cliff and down into the jungle. I can't make out any individual trees either. It looks like one solid tree with a million trunks, only the foliage looks more like the vines."

"See any animals yet —? Wait a minute, Hal — the skipper just came in. I'll let him take over."

Still rubbing his eyes, Isaacs took the microphone. "'Lo, Rogan. Everything okay down there?"

"Sure, Skipper," Hal purred. "Hope you had a nice little rest and didn't get up just on *my* account."

Isaacs darkened, glowered at the microphone. "That's enough sarcasm for now, Rogan. I didn't think you needed my guidance."

"I don't."

"*What* then? An audience?"

"Forget it, Boss."

"Heh heh! Yes, well — how about it? Think you'll have time to send two men out to scout the vicinity before dark?"

"I can see all the vicinity from here. What do you want scouted?"

"The jungle, naturally."

There was an unpleasant silence, broken only by the dogs' frantic cries in the background.

"The jungle — *now?*"

"If you have the time before dark. What's the difference, now or tomorrow?"

"I've got a feeling," Rogan muttered. "If we waited long enough, the jungle'd come up to scout us."

"What kind of drivel —?"

"Nothing, Skipper. I'll send a couple of men to look for a way down the cliff. Doubt if we can get down and back before dark though."

"Okay — you have a list of

data you're supposed to collect. Collect it as soon as possible. That's all. Keep in touch with Esperson here."

Isaacs handed the microphone back to Rod, peered at the radar for a moment, then stalked out of the cabin and closed the door.

"He's gone, Hal."

"Having a fine time. Wish to hell he was here."

"Still worried?"

"I don't know. It's funny —"

"What's funny?"

"I'm not so nervous now. Feel kind of good, little sleepy. Even the dogs have shut up."

"Worn out, maybe."

"Maybe. Anyway, they simmered down all of a sudden. They're just lying there on their bellies. Panting and looking around. It's funny —"

"Yeah?"

"I think the jungle bothered me at first because — well, it kinda wriggles. Or it looks that way. But if you look at it right, it — it"s got a weird sort of beauty. If you *think* about it right, that is."

"How do you mean?"

"The way it wriggles, real slow — like something climbing around in the branches, something you can't see. That gave me a chill at first. But once you figure it's not something climbing, but just the trees moving, then it's all right."

Rod shivered. "Doesn't sound all right to me! How quick could you get out of there if you had to?"

Hal laughed calmly. "Don't get ulcers up there, Rod. We'll be okay."

"I don't like the way you sound so sure all of a sudden."

Hal laughed again. "I'm going to sign off for awhile. Think the boys have found something. I'll call you back before dark."

"Okay."

Rod peered out the port at the plump crescent of the Nun hanging in space. Then he estimated where the twilight line would fall on the disk that showed on the radar scope. It was somewhere in the region of the mesa, and he knew that it must be nearly dark where the launch lay.

Minutes later, Isaacs wandered back, munching alternately from a square of hardtack and a slab of compressed dried beef. "Hungry?" he grunted around a mouthful of food.

Rod shook his head. He was too anxious about Hal Rogan to leave the communicator.

"Thirsty?" Isaacs deposited the beef atop the radar and handed him a flask.

"Water?"

"Fifty percent of it is."

Esperson had a long drink. The other fifty percent proved warmly relaxing — after he stopped gagging on it. He knew the skipper was less untroubled than he tried

to appear. Isaacs seldom tippled. He sat next to Rod, peered absently at the radar, and washed down nibbles of food with sips of cut alcohol.

"You know, Esp — we ought to get a good bonus out of the Commission for this one."

"Hal Rogan and his boys ought to get one, that's for sure."

"Eh? Oh, I wouldn't worry about them."

"I'd feel better if we were in a twenty-hour orbit."

"Don't be a half-wit. I can't put seventy men in jeopardy for the sake of six."

"Yeah."

"Don't you agree?"

"Yeah. I just said I'd feel better, that's all."

Isaacs sneered half in jest. "Why didn't *you* volunteer to go down instead of Rogan?"

Rod shrugged. "You had too many volunteers anyway. I stick my neck out when it's necessary, not before. Okay?"

"Okay with me. As long as you're around when it's necessary."

"Tell you what: for an extra thousand a month, you can consider me a perpetual volunteer for everything."

"Suckers come cheaper than that."

"I know it."

Isaacs grinned and handed him the flask. He sipped it politely but ineffectively, and grinned

widely back at him.

Rogan's carrier was flicking on and off, as if he started several times to put in a call, then thought better of it. Isaacs grumbled and reached for the mike, but Rogan's voice came through suddenly. Rogan sounded amused — hysterically amused, maybe.

"Rod, this is Hal. You with me? Over."

"This is Isaacs, Rogan. Stop giggling. What do you want?"

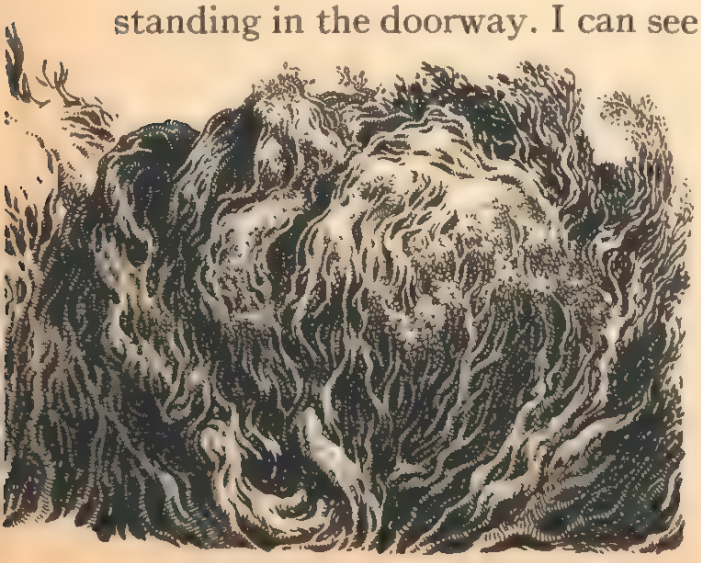
"There's a house."

Isaacs looked at Esperson and blinked. "What did he say?"

Rod Esperson's beefy face went slack. "He said —'There's a house.'"

"That's what I thought he said." Isaacs keyed the mike again. "What the devil are you talking about, Rogan?"

"There's a house, Skipper — down at the foot of the cliff." Rogan giggled again. "It's a log house with a thatched roof. Got a light in it, and there's a fat man standing in the doorway. I can see his silhouette. He waved at us."



Rod's scalp reminded him that his ancestors once possessed erectile hackles. He licked his lips and stared at the skipper. Isaacs went white, then pink.

"*Don't make cute jokes with me, Rogan!*" he bellowed. "One more crack like that and I'll have the detention cabin ready for you, boy!"

"Blow it out your obscenity!" the speaker barked. "I said there's a house down there with a light in it and a man in the doorway. Only now he's outside. He's coming up the cliff."

Isaacs sputtered and dropped the microphone. Rod grabbed it.

"What the devil do you mean, Hal — 'a man'? A human? That's impossible."

"It's getting so dark, it's hard to see. Looks completely human." He paused to bellow at someone about getting a spotlight out of the ship. Then: "Hold on, Rod! I'll call you back."

"*Wait!* Don't get off the air!"

But it was too late. Rogan had evidently switched off his set. Isaacs was still growling wrathfully to himself.

"I'll have him canned, by God! Court martialed! I'll —"

"There was *something*, Skipper!" Rod offered. "I heard the dogs howling again."

"That's the way Rogan'll howl when I —"

"Take it easy, Boss. He's not kidding. That planet could conceivably have humanoid life forms."

"Baloney!"

"It has trees."

"So what?"

"Where there are trees, some animals'll learn to climb them. Tree climbers, unless they're rather small, usually develop hands. And their spines get pulled vertical by hanging from limbs. Hands are good for grasping more things than limbs. It's easier to pick fruit than it is to bite off a twig. The cleverest ones begin finding new things to do with their hands — like swinging clubs to beat hell out of the beasts that chased them up in the trees in the first place. So you've got a biped with hands and a club; the ones with enough sense to use them efficiently do a good job of survival. Whenever you've got trees, why shouldn't you have humanoids — eventually?"

Isaacs started to growl, then paused, grunted thoughtfully, and subsided. "Yeah, I've heard that drivel before. But I've also seen planets with trees — usually inhabited by winged lizards or snakes disguised to look like vines. No humanoids, Esp."

The lieutenant shrugged. "First time, maybe. Anyhow — I know Hal pretty well. He's not kidding, Skipper."

Isaacs took a stiff drink and glared at the communicator. "Call him back again right away."

"Hal from Rod. Skipper wants you. Get on the air. Over."

They waited — to no avail.

"Rogan from Esperson! Acknowledge me, damn it! Skipper wants you. Over!"

"Chatting with friend humanoid, no doubt," Isaacs said sourly. "I'll kill that jockey." He began thoughtfully beating a big fist into his palm.

"Maybe he's in trouble, Boss."

"Yeah — he *is* — I assure you of that."

They fell into brooding silence. The twilight line of the shrouded Nun had crept past the low mesa, and Rod knew that the landing site was immersed in black night. Occasionally he reached for Isaacs' flask, and an hour later the Skipper went to get it refilled. The communicator remained silent, except for bursts of mild solar interference.

Isaacs got out a manual of space code and began leafing through it with grim purpose. After a time he chuckled quietly, and muttered aloud. "In the event that the ship be in flight such that the next scheduled docking at a Class A port is greater than 120 days' ship's time from date of misdemeanor or felony, ship's commander may administer summary punishment for offenses not exceeding Class 3 in gravity in order to secure immediate discipline. For Class 3 offenses, twenty

lashes with a whip of rawhide not exceeding —"

"Can it, Boss. You can't get away with it."

"I can dream, bigawd! Call Rogan again."

"Launch One, this is the Archangel. Do you read me, Hal? Over."

After a moment, the carrier wave hissed quietly. "Hello, Rod — Hal. Sorry, my set went out on me. Listen, we weren't the first ship to land on this planet."

"What are you talking about? No Commission ship has ever scouted this planet before."

"I know, but remember the Yorick?"

"Uh — wait a minute." He glanced at Isaacs. "Ever hear of the Yorick?"

"Starship that got lost about ten years back. No trace of it since. But if he's going to say —"

"Okay, Hal. Skipper reads you. Go on."

"This guy — this Johnny — he was on the crew. The Yorick wasn't lost. Bum chemicals in the hydroponics; all but three of the crew died of chemical poisoning. The three couldn't handle the ship alone. They took a launch and came here."

Rod exchanged a puzzled glance with Isaacs. The skipper licked his lips and shook his head doubtfully. "Sounds fishy, Esp."

"Hal?"

"Yeah?"

"You'd better start at the beginning."

"Okay. Well, you were listening when we spotted this guy and his cabin. He came running up to the mesa as soon as he saw what we were. He's half nuts, Rod — from living by himself all this time. But he started talking English. We got the story out of him in bits and snatches."

"Wait a minute. You said there were three of them. What happened to the other two?"

"We can't get it straight. Like I said, he's off his rocker. He keeps saying, 'But they're both right here, bethide me' — he lisps. I guess they died. He keeps talking to them, when we leave him alone. Three beds in the cabin, three places at the table. Kinda gets you. He's such a pathetic chap."

"What's his name?"

"Johnny — Johnny Sree, I think. Short fat fellow with big round eyes and a baby face. About forty, maybe — but it's hard to tell on account of the discolorations."

"Huh?"

"His skin and hair have turned darn near the color of this jungle — chartreuse and splotched. Not really, but almost. He says the food did it. I don't know whether it's something he ate here or the chemical poisoning that clobbered the Yorick's crew. It's hard to get much out of him. He just fawns

on everybody and sniffles and talks about how much he'd like to have a chocolate eclair and a cup of creole coffee."

"Where's the launch he came in?"

"Not much telling. He doesn't seem to know. He might have wandered five hundred miles in ten years."

Isaacs grabbed the microphone. "Listen, Rogan!" he snarled. "I've got to stop and think this over. But by God, you keep that damn receiver on this time, or I'll have you fed to the test-dogs in small bites!"

"Oh, that reminds me, Chief. The dogs are dead."

"Wh-h-hat?"

"Dead. When Johnny came up, they went crazy again. Tried to kill him. We had to shoot them."

"Fool! Now you'll have to stay in your suits!"

There was a brief pause. "We took 'em off an hour ago, Skipper. After all, Johnny's better proof than the dogs. He's been around ten years."

Rod watched Isaacs for an explosion. But the skipper wore an icy smile. He spoke softly.

"Okay, Rogan. That's all right with me. And you can wear the suits after you get back to the ship — *all the way back to Earth* — for the crew's protection. Of course, they get a little filthy after five months, but you won't mind. Goodbye, Rogan."

The launch pilot stammered witlessly for a moment, then signed off. Rod lit a cigaret and stared at the commander.

"Want me to take another launch and go down —?"

"No."

"Well — what about it?"

"About what?"

"This Johnny Sri, or Sree."

The skipper tapped a pencil and glowered silently at his own thoughts for a time. He doodled a few figures on a scratch pad, then looked up with a crafty smile.

"The Nun has about sixty million square miles of land area, doesn't it?"

"Y'ah."

"About half of which lies in a viable temperature zone."

"Check."

"Then the odds against Rogan's just happening to land within a five-mile radius of any given point are about four hundred thousand to one. The odds against an accidental landing within five miles of this — this Johnny Sree."

"Why talk about the odds against something that's already happened?"

"Because I wonder if it was accidental."

Rod snorted. "Wake up, Skipper. *You and I* picked the site!"

"I know, I know." Isaacs clasped his hands behind his back

and paced the deck. "But why did we pick it?"

"Only decent place I found when I went down under the clouds."

"Why?"

"The fog was lifted there. You know all this! I don't get —"

"*Why* was the fog lifted there?"

Rod snorted disgust. "Call the Nun's weather bureau. What the devil are you groping for?"

"I don't know, I don't know at all." He grimaced and clucked to himself. "I just don't like freak accidents. And bumping into a lone survivor that way is a freak accident."

"Well, if you've got a hunch, why don't you have Rogan haul this Johnny back up here right now? We'll have a look at him."

"No!" He shook his head vigorously. "I won't act on a blind hunch, even in a minor matter. It's a bad habit to get into. Let Rogan use his own judgement. If he feels safe down there, he might as well finish gathering data before he comes back."

Isaacs paused, then stalked to a shelf of books and pulled down an old copy of *Annual Report of the Space Commission*. He thumbed through it for a moment.

"The Yorick," he muttered, "Class K-O, thirty thousand tons, five-space cruising speed three-fifty cees, rocket thrust five-hundred meganewtons, crew ninety-five — lost after last report at co-ordinates . . ." He stopped reading, returned the book to the shelf, and sighed. "Maybe I'm just jumpy, Esperson. The last report was about three light-years from here — in Fornax."

"You mean you didn't believe this Johnny was a crewman?" Rod laughed. "Sure — local fauna evolves humanoids, also evolves an Earth language, and a knowledge of chocolate eclairs."

Isaacs flushed. "Telepathy, maybe."

"Gathering notions to bolster your hunch?"

"All *right*, damn it! What do you think then, Esperson?"

"Nothing."

"You think everything's okay down there?"

Rod paused. "I've got no logical thoughts about it. Just a feeling."

"What's that?"

"It's nasty. Can't quite put my finger on it. When I look at that damn chartreuse jungle — well, it reminds me of an old spacer I knew once. He went schizo on Mars Station. Hated everybody. He'd sit and brood, and stare out at the lichen patches. Pretty soon his face'd start wiggling, changing expression — fear, rage, lust, and then gloating cruelty. He'd whisper to himself. You'd wonder who he was murdering in his daydreams and how."

Isaacs didn't laugh. "Of course,

I haven't seen the jungle —"

"What bothers me: Rogan's feelings seemed to change after he landed."

There was a long silence. Isaacs sighed. "Well, call him up — tell him to go according to schedule and bring this fellow back at rendezvous time."

Rod nodded and reached for the mike.

"And tell him to report in every hour until we're below his horizon."

He put in the call, and Hal answered in a leisurely voice. He could hear laughter in the background.

"Having wonderful time," Rogan called jovially. "Wish you were here."

"You sound drunk. What's wrong?"

"Wrong? Nothing, nothing at all. Just finished a big meal. Made me sleepy. Johnny's a good cook. Fed all five of us like kings."

"*Johnny!* Migawd! You don't mean you're eating stuff that grows down there!" He glanced in horror at Isaacs who was shaking his head and wiping his face.

"Sure, Rod. Food's fine. Nothing wrong with it. Say — I like this place! Be marvelous for a colony."

"Tell him to come back up," muttered the Skipper. "They've gone nuts! Tell him to pile back in that launch and get back up here immediately."

"Bringing Johnny?"

"Yeah."

"Okay, listen Hal! Skipper's orders: return to the Archangel immediately. Let the survey go. Let everything go. Get back up here, and bring Johnny."

There was a long silence, then Rogan grunted belligerantly.

"*Why?*"

Isaacs grabbed the mike. "Because I said to, you obscenity!" he roared.

"Sorry, Skipper," Rogan said dully. "I can't."

"*What?*"

"I can't. One of the jets is out. Greeley's working on it."

"As soon as it's fixed then, get back up here!"

"I don't see why."

"You don't *need* to see why, Rogan. I'm leading the band."

"Well — okay, but it'll take a while. Half a day at least."

"Call in every hour. That's all."

"Check, Boss. Over and out."

Isaacs and Esperson mused in silence for a time.

"Wonder what he meant — 'fed all five of them'," Isaacs muttered. "Where's the sixth?"

"Greeley — working on the ship," Rod offered.

"Oh — yeah." The skipper blew a hard breath. "Go get some rest if you want to, Esperson. I'll make the next couple of contacts."

Rod retired willingly. From his hammock he could see the thin

white crescent of the Nun through the viewing port. He shuddered and turned his back on it.

He awoke with the feeling that someone had called him. He glanced at the Nun again. The crescent was facing the opposite direction. He looked at his watch — nearly a nine-hour sleep.

"Esperson!" growled the interphone call system. "How many times do I have to call? Answer me."

He fumbled sleepily for the call switch. "Sorry, Skipper — I was dead. What's up?"

"Get down here right away."

"Trouble?"

No answer. Isaacs was evidently busy at something. Rod switched his jack-box to command-position and listened briefly to the radio. Rogan was on, arguing hotly with Isaacs. He made little sense of it.

He dressed hurriedly and paced down the corridor to the control cabin. Isaacs faced the communicator, white-faced and speechless. He changed chairs when Rod entered.

"You talk to him, Esp. Maybe *I'm* crazy."

"Talk about what?"

"Just talk to him."

He lifted the mike thoughtfully.

"Hal, this is Rod. What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong!" snapped the loudspeaker. "Skipper's playing jokes, that's all."

"Sorry, I missed it. What're you talking about?"

"Ask him!"

Rod looked questioningly at Isaacs. The commander's face was a rigid mask, his eyes narrow. He grunted a command.

"Ask Rogan how many men went down in the launch."

"Six did — you know that."

"*Ask* him."

"Hello, Hal — how many men in your party?"

Rogan's tone was disgusted. "You too, huh? Okay, I'll call the roll: Winters, Greeley, Jameson, and myself."

"Go on."

"That's *it!* Four! Quit your kidding!"

Rod's scalp crawled. "What about Richards and Elvin?"

"Oh *nooooo!* All right, we'll play games. Richards married Elvin and they went on a honeymoon. Listen — I never heard of any Richards or Elvin. Cut it out, will you? You give me the creeps."

"*We* give *him* the creeps!" Isaacs groaned.

"What are you doing now?" Rod called.

"Finishing my breakfast."

"More of Johnny's cooking?"

"Sure. He enjoys having company."

"How's that defective tube?"

"Greeley's still working on it. Few more hours should do it."

"We'll be below your horizon pretty quick now."

"So what?"

"Yeah." He swallowed hard and looked at the skipper. "What can I say to him?"

"Nothing that I haven't already said. Just break it off."

"That's all, Hal. Call us immediately if any more men disappear."

"Who's disappeared? Quit it, will you?"

"Yeah. Over and out."

The cabin was full of hard breathing. Isaacs got up and paced the floor. Esperson brooded by the radio.

"Skipper, shall I take a launch now and go down —"

"No! No more men on the Nun!"

"Look, Rogan's my friend. It's my neck if —"

Isaacs shook his head. "Wait until they get that tube fixed. Then we'll see."

At the end of an hour, Rogan called again to report progress. Greeley would be finished soon. But the communicator signal had lost strength, now emanating from the very limb of the planet. Soon they would be out of contact.

"I can't stand just sitting here, Skipper!"

"Then go take a walk."

"I'd rather take a flight. Down."

"No."

Rod cradled his head in his hands and stared grimly at the deck. "I wish we had some answers."

"To what questions?"

"That's just it! There aren't even any sensible questions to ask. How can you ask about Richards and Elvin when Rogan won't even admit their existence?"

The skipper smiled mirthlessly. "I learned a few things while you were asleep."

"About what?"

"That jungle. It's all one big organism — grown together. I got Rogan to hold still long enough to tell me about it. It's an animal and vegetable duality. Symbiosis to the point of part-time identity. Did Rogan mention the flying things to you?"

"Yeah."

"They grow on the trees, like fruit. But they're apparently animal. They break loose when they're mature. The jungle feeds them. In return, they keep the insects out of the trees. And Rogan said something about there being an animal down there too, but I didn't get it straight."

"*One* animal?"

"Evidently. He said he hadn't seen it though. But it's that jungle that bothers me. Apparently the keynote of life on the Nun is cooperation rather than conflict."

"How's that?"

"The jungle feeds Johnny too. Deliberately, I mean. Rogan said

the fruit grows right in through the window of the cabin." He laughed peculiarly. "I guess it put on a few extras for the boys."

Rod shivered. "And what does Johnny do for the jungle?"

"There," Isaacs said grimly, "you have a good question."

The time for another contact was approaching. Rod tried three times before he heard an answering signal.

". . . barely hear you, Rod," came Rogan's faint voice. "You're on my horizon. When are you going to send somebody down . . ." A crackle of static drowned the rest of it.

"Hal from Rod, Hal from Rod. Say again, please. You want us to send somebody down. I didn't get the rest of it. Say again, please. Over."

The voice came as a feeble whisper. ". . . somebody down to fix the tube. Nobody here knows how. When are you going to . . ."

"Hal from Rod. I thought Greeley had it about fixed. What's wrong. Can't Greeley finish what he started? Over."

"Say again, Rod. Didn't quite get that name. Over."

"Greeley. Greeley. I spell: george-roger-easy-easy-love-easy-yoke. Greeley. Can't he fix it? Over."

". . . never heard of Greeley. More gags, huh?"

"*Oh no!*" Esperson clapped his forehead and groaned. Isaacs made a sick sound in his throat.

"Hal from Rod. Who's down there? Call the roll again."

"I'm getting sick of this," came the weak whisper. "There's me — Rogan. Okay?"

"Who else?"

"Winters and Jameson, of course! And Johnny Six."

"*Huh!* I thought his name was Sree?"

"Three? What gave you that idea? Not Three — *Six.*"

"But you said — *Sree!*" Esperson nearly screamed it.

"Not Sree either. I didn't say anything of the kind. I said Six."

Rod stuttered for a moment and offered the microphone to Isaacs. Isaacs stared at it and shook his head. He looked dazed.

"Listen!" Rod shouted. "Can't you fix that jet yourself?"

". . . can try, but I'm no mech . . ."

There was a sputter of static. The signal faded out.

"Hal from Rod. Over."

No answer.

"Hal, Hal, Hal! Hal Rogan from starship Archangel. Launch One from the Archangel. Anybody-at-all from Esperson. Answer me. Over."

Silence, save for faint cracklings from the loudspeaker.

"It's no use, Esp. Horizon's cut us off. We'll have to wait forty hours."

"*Please*, Skipper! Let me take

a launch and —"

"Shut up! If you think I'm going to send any more men down there, you're nuts! At least not while we're out of communication with that point on the planet."

Esperson's voice went cold. "How will you enter it in the log? — 'Left six men to die on 2794-II without bothering to investigate'".

"Maybe, maybe I will!" Isaacs snapped.

"Excuse me, Commander. I think I'll go back to my cabin." He started out.

"Wait."

"Okay?"

"I guess you're right. We've got to do something. We'll get out of this orbit and back up to get in communicator range again. Then you can take a launch down into the atmosphere. I'll go with you in fact — to make damn sure you don't land unless it's safe."

"Quinn has the reactors half-dismantled for thirty-day inspection, Skipper. It'll take a couple of hours to get started, then two or three more hours to jockey it back over Rogan's meridian."

"All right!" Isaacs snapped. "Five hours is better than forty, isn't it?"

"Sure, Boss. Thanks."

"You might as well get a launch ready. And pick eight big huskies to go with us. See that they take all the arms they can carry."

Esperson grinned and hurried away — to pack a crate of incendiary grenades. If the jungle proved a threat, he could always start a few forest fires.

Starships such as the Archangel were not built to do much maneuvering in strong gravitational fields. They were assembled in space, and they stayed in space; landings were accomplished by launch while the starship remained in an orbit about the planet. When the centrifugal force of the ship's curved course did not match the force of gravity for its orbit, continuous rocket-thrust and continuous piloting were needed to hold it in the desired position.

But after three hours, the site of Rogan's landing was back in communicator range. Isaacs tried several calls without result.

"He wouldn't be listening, Skipper," Rod offered. "He thinks we're out of range."

"Have you got the men ready?"

"They're waiting in the launch. It'll leave the ship pretty short handed."

Isaacs nodded, then jabbed the interphone button. "Allenby from Isaacs. Call me."

"Go ahead, Chief," grunted the speaker. "Allenby speaking."

"You'll be in command until we get back. Hold over the meridian as long as you can. Then build up orbital velocity again and hold it. We should be back

before then, I'm sure."

"Check."

"One other thing. If we don't get back within eighty hours, go home."

"Do *what?*"

"Go home. Don't send another launch. You can't spare the manpower."

"I — I —"

"What's the matter?"

"Sir, would you mind writing out that order and signing it in the presence of two witnesses?"

Isaacs smiled sourly. "Sure, Al. We want to make sure the Commission doesn't blame you, if you have to go back without us. Don't we?"

"I —"

"Shut up."

"Yes, sir."

"I'll write out the order."

Minutes later, the belly of the Archangel groaned open, and the launch swung slowly out on grapples into the sun-glaring blackness. Esperson sat in the pilot's seat with Isaacs at his right, glaring down at the orb of the Nun. Eight men sat buckled in behind.

"Let 'er go."

The launch drifted slowly away as the grapples gave it a parting shove. Rod hit the turning jets, aimed the launch astern of the mother ship, and started the rockets. The skipper stared back at the Archangel as the small craft dove out of the orbit.

"Saying good-bye?" Rod grunted.

Isaacs muttered inaudibly and turned his gaze on the planet as the Archangel vanished above and behind them. It was night again on the mesa, but dawn would be approaching by the time they landed. Rod tried periodic calls, without rousing Rogan.

The disk grew until it blotted a third of space. The skipper touched his hand to his forehead and murmured weakly.

"What's wrong, Boss?"

"Headache."

Rod glanced back at the others. One man was clenching his head between his hands and shaking it violently. Another was pounding his temples with his palms. A third hugged his knees and looked sick. Rod frowned; he felt nothing.

As they entered the cloud blanket, Isaacs groped for a medical kit and swallowed two anti-nausea pills.

"Better pass 'em around, Skipper. You're not alone."

"Alone," he groaned. "That's the way I feel — like we're not alone."

"*Huh?* I mean the boys 're sick too."

"Oh." He pitched the medical kit back to the huskies.

"Help any?"

"Not yet."

But half an hour later, he lifted his face out of his hands, straight-

ened, and grinned.

"Feel better?"

"Yeah. That was a lulu! Felt like chickens pecking around in my head."

The others seemed similarly relieved.

"Skipper?"

"Yeah?"

"Have you ever bumped into any telepathic organisms?"

"Nah! Don't believe it's possible."

"What about those communicating plants on Beta Hydri Four?"

"What about 'em? Might be subterranean supersonics."

"Yeah — maybe."

"What are you getting at, Esperson?"

"Nothing. Nothing that won't take care of itself after awhile."

They fell silent. The mesa had grown to the size of a large coin on the radar screen when they broke through the bottom of the clouds.

"Migawd! It's not dawn yet, but you can see!" Isaacs gasped.

Rod peered uneasily at the gloomy but faintly glowing jungle. "Phosphorescence," he murmured. "Believe I can see well enough to land. Shall I try it, Skipper?"

"No. Circle awhile. Try to get Rogan on the communicator."

He tried for a time in vain. Then, after the fourth call . . .

"Hello, Launch Two, thith ith Johnny Nine. Welcome to my little world." It was a high burbley voice, jovial yet strangely affected.

Goose flesh crawled along Esperson's sides. He shivered and glanced at the skipper. Isaacs stared moodily ahead.

Johnny Three, Johnny Six, Johnny Nine — what the devil! Esperson scowled.

"Johnny from Launch, where's Rogan? Over."

"Athleep. They're all thleeping."

"How about Richards and Greeley and Elvin?"

"Thleeping too."

"Not missing?"

"Nobody ith mithing, thir."

"Then wake them up, will you?"

There was a pause. "It'th not their time to be awake, thir. I cannot." There was a sharp click.

"Hey there! Don't go off the air!" But it was too late.

He glanced at Isaacs again. The skipper made no emotional response at all to the conversation.

"Skipper, were you listening?"

"Yeah — I guess it was a joke after all. He said they were all sleeping."

"You believe it, huh?"

Isaacs shrugged, almost indifferently.

Rod circled the vicinity of the mesa until the underbelly of the

clouds became gray with dawn, and the pale green phosphorescence of the jungle faded into gloomy morning. He stared at the landing site until he spotted the first launch.

"Skipper! Look at Launch One — lying on its *side!* And it's half covered by vines."

Isaacs peered for a time, then nodded. "Yeah."

"Doesn't bother you, huh?" Rod snapped irritably.

"Bother me? Yeah, I guess it does." His face remained impassive.

Rod glanced back at the others. Two of them were dozing. The others waited apathetically. No one seemed tense or nervous. Maybe *I'm* just out of guts, he thought irritably.

"Want to land now, Skipper?" he muttered, hoping for a negative answer.

"Sure. Might as well."

Twice he buzzed low over the plateau, hoping to see a human figure waving or signalling as he passed. He saw no one. The mesa was empty save for the vines and the toppled launch.

"Go ahead and land," Isaacs grumbled.

Rod growled a curse to himself, threw the ship into a vertical climb, adjusted the thrust to match the gravity, then lessened it by a small degree and watched the land float upward beneath them. The ship settled, scorched half-an-acre of vines, and rumbled down on its tripodal tail structure with scarcely a bounce. An automatic control blasted a white fan of fire-extinguishing vapor in a fifty-yard radius about the ship.

Rod waited for a moment until the dust and smoke had cleared, then looked around for crewmen from the first launch. The small tableland was still empty.

"Wonder where Johnny Whatsis went to?" he grumbled.

Isaacs was already out of his seat and heading for the airlock with the others following close behind. He called after them anxiously.

"Don't you think you better wait, Skipper, until —"

The smack and thud of the lock cut him off, and his ears crackled as the pressure changed abruptly. They had propped open the inner door and opened the outer. Rod shook his head and climbed out of the control seat. He tripped over a grenade-thrower and cursed. Half of them had forgotten their weapons. *What was wrong with them?* This was an alien world. They all knew better — especially Isaacs.

He picked up the grenade thrower and went to stand in the airlock, staring out across the mesa. The vines crawled everywhere, tangles of dark tendrils that lacked extensive foliage. The bodies of the dogs lay near the other ship, and he noticed that the

vines had already grown in a tight net about them — as if seeking nourishment in the dead flesh. He shuddered as he saw the tip of a tendril move slowly upward and turn its tip in a slow circle, as if searching for the source of some external stimulus that it felt. It paused as it pointed in the general direction of the men who were now milling about the edge of the cliff.

Rod leaped down from the airlock and trod across the vines to where the other ship lay helpless. He prowled about it for a time, then opened the hatch and slipped inside. One look around the cabin chilled him. The instrument panels were wrecked, the rocket controls dismantled.

Clearly sabotage. But who —?

He heard someone climbing through the hatch.

"Nithe weather, ithn't it?" burbled a voice behind him.

Rod ducked low as he whirled and snatched reflexively at his sidearms. A small yelp escaped him, and his hair felt erect. Johnny Nine stood looking at the gun. He smiled blandly — a chubby fellow with tiny teeth and a skin whose texture suggested rosiness. But its actual color was gray, tinged with yellow-green. He seemed to be concentrating deeply for a moment. Then he shook his head.

"You aren't like the otherth, are you?" he said, and snickered.

Rod grunted and let the gun fall, but he kept it in hand.

"The retht of uth are different from you."

"What difference —?"

"I don't think you'll ever like thith plathe."

"I hate it — as of now!"

"That *ith* unfortunate."

Something about Johnny revolted him. "Get out of the way!" he snarled, and started toward the airlock. When Johnny failed to move fast enough, he shoved him roughly aside. The plump man staggered, tripped, grabbed at a tuning unit as he fell. He yelped and peered at his hand, bleeding from a small cut. The blood was nearly black.

Sickened, Rod moved on. As he let himself down outside, there was a muffled explosion from the direction of the other ship, followed by hearty laughter. He stopped to stare. A wisp of smoke drifted from the other lock. Seven men stood in a half circle, grinning at it broadly.

"What's going on?" he bellowed in fright.

No one seemed to hear him.

He started toward the launch on a dead run. Another explosion — inside the ship — and it sounded like a grenade. More smoke from the lock. He cried out frantically as he ran. The vines tripped him and he sprawled headlong, cracking his head against a rock. He lay dazed for a mo-

ment, feeling gingerly around the dangerous spot in his skull where a piece of bone was missing, replaced by a thin silver plate. It seemed okay, but he felt dizzy.

Looking up, he saw Isaacs and another man emerge from the lock, sway slightly, and shake their heads as if recovering from shock. The men's grins disappeared; they seemed to come to their senses.

"Can anybody repair an instrument panel and an air pump?" the skipper bellowed. "We've got some trouble with the equipment!"

Rod groaned in horror and climbed weakly to his feet, shaking off a vine that had tightened about his ankle. He ran toward them again.

"Somebody's got to fix that stuff!" Isaacs pleaded.

"Migawd, Skipper!" Rod bellowed. "What happened? What did you do?"

Isaacs failed to answer, failed even to see or hear him. Rod grabbed the nearest crewman by the shoulder and shook him.

"Barnes! Tell me what happened."

Barnes rocked with the shaking, but seemed not to notice it. He was smiling dazedly at Isaacs, standing in the airlock.

"We *must* have an instrument-man out of nine men!" the skipper called plaintively.

"*Obermann!*" Rod roared. "You're an instrument-man! Speak up, damn it!"

Obermann ignored him. Rod pushed him forward. Obermann recovered his balance but failed to make a further response.

"Skipper!" Rod called, pushing his way toward the lock. "Get away from the launch. Get everybody away. I can fix it."

". . . out of nine men," the skipper was saying.

"Ten men!" Rod roared. "Get out of the way!"

Isaacs ignored him completely. In rage, he caught the commander's ankle and jerked. Isaacs tumbled forward, fell four feet, and landed in a sprawled heap on the ground. He groaned slightly, then picked himself up indifferently, and addressed the men again.

"Well, then. I guess there's nothing to do but call the Archangel to send down a couple of repairmen."

Rod grunted a curse and kicked Isaacs in the seat of the pants. He sprawled again, but took no notice of the fact. Esperson was trembling. But he was never a man to deny the obvious, just because he lacked an explanation of it. The men refused to acknowledge his existence; he faced the fact, and the hell with immediate logic. He dived for the airlock and pulled himself inside.

The grenades had wrecked several panels and the airpump. There was no getting away until

they were fixed. But no third launch was going to be called down from the Archangel! Of that he meant to make certain. He removed the power-amplifier tube from the communications transmitter and pocketed it, together with the three spares.

Isaacs re-entered the launch, bumped into him, stepped around him without recognizing his presence. Rod leaned against the wall and watched him try to use the set. When he failed, he went back outside.

"Any radiomen?"

There was no answer from the group.

Rod left the launch and watched them throng back across the mesa to the cliff where they wandered aimlessly, peering down at the jungle. He glanced toward Rogan's launch. Johnny Nine sat in the vines near it, watching the others. Rod stalked toward him, and stood a few feet away, automatic dangling in his hand. They stared at each other coolly. Johnny was holding his cut hand. The tip of a vine tendril was wound about his wrist and touched the cut as if it had grown fast there.

"What *are* you?"

"My name is Johnny Nine."

He paused. "What was Rogan's wife's maiden name?" he snapped.

"Alma Marne," said the dappled fat man.

The automatic twitched upward, then paused. It was just possible that Rogan had supplied him with that information in conversation. He needed to find something that Rogan certainly wouldn't have spread around voluntarily, something that Johnny wouldn't know, unless —

"What kind of operation was performed on Alma last earth-year?"

"Ah — her left breatht wath removed for canther."

Rod gritted his teeth and shot Johnny Nine in the belly. The shot blended with the scream. When he doubled forward, Rod shot him again in the top of the head. He slumped. The writhing response of the vines was immediate, but he had no time to watch. There was shouting from the cliff-top, and a shot. The bullet sang past him and ricocheted from the hull of Launch One.

He ducked low and raced around behind the launch, then scurried for a low ridge. Another bullet struck the ground to his left and sprayed him with fragments of rock. He veered and dodged and made it across the ridge. The shots ceased. There were no sounds of pursuit. Evidently the awareness of his presence had been only temporary. He stopped, then crawled back to the top of the ridge. Isaacs and the others had gathered around Johnny, staring down in bewilderment.

Where was the source of the hypnotic delusion? Apparently Johnny had been only its focus. The jungle — the organismic jungle? Or something that lurked unseen therein? And what made him immune?

The only difference that recommended itself immediately was the silver plate in his skull. If telepathic transfer were possible, its medium would have to be some quantitatively measurable energy form, perhaps electromagnetic in character. And that silver plate — it might be like the electrostatic shielding around an electron tube.

He looked around, surveying the terrain behind him and beyond the ridge. It sloped down gently into the jungle. The mesa was shaped like the rock of Gibraltar, steep toward the south, but sloping northward.

As long as the others remained in a state of hypnotelepathic suggestibility, he dare not risk rejoining them. Whatever power controlled their actions might order his death, as it had ordered the sabotage of the ship. He eased himself down from the ridge and hurried down the slope toward the jungle — eerie and fetid. Its odor was funereal, like incense at a Mass for the dead. And it hissed wetly within itself, a slushy dripping sound.

As he walked along its edges, seeking a path around the mesa, the foliage and tendrils seemed to slowly turn, following him like a sunflower tracking the sun. He noticed that the vines had their origins about the roots of the trees; perhaps they were connected.

He followed the contour of the foot of the slope, wending his way around, and steering clear of the dense growth. A six-foot, orchid-like blossom followed his approach, and began to grow slowly out to block his path, supported by an arm-thick tendril. It faced him like the open jaws of a rattler, its petals thick and white, its throat an ugly crimson. He stopped. The thing inched toward him.

He shot it through the supporting tendril. The flower squeaked. The jaws snapped shut. It writhed back out of his path and threshed about in the brush. He passed several others like it as he moved ahead, but instead of trying to intercept, they withdrew deeper into the tangled growth. Some of them were closed — with bulges showing in their tendrils. The bulges varied in size, and one was large enough to suggest the possible fate of Rogan and the others.

Grimly, he moved on. The slope became a steep embankment, developed an overhang of rock. It began to rain. He stepped under the overhang to keep dry and stood studying the writhing jun-

gle. There were pods dangling from the mesh of branches. They varied in size from a few inches in length to several feet, but all resembled gourds in shape. He chose the largest for a target and put a bullet through its fat bottom. It writhed and leaked yellow. It thudded and changed shape and wrestled within itself, as if something were trying to get out.

Then it split half open, and a hideous face peered wildly out. It shrieked its pain to the jungle. Then the fruit collapsed, and it fell thirty feet to crash in the brush where it lay whistling *kreee kreee kreee.*

Rod shivered. The thing had been a batlike creature with white membranous wings folded about its weak foetal body. After a time it fell silent in the brush. The rain continued.

A popping sound came from directly overhead. He looked up. A broken vine was swinging there, pendulumlike. Another broke while he stared. The vines were grown tightly around a large loose rock. With a startled shout he darted out into the rain. The vines were making a concerted effort to loosen the rock. He watched for several minutes until it thundered loose and crashed down where he had been standing.

He hurried away after growling an enraged curse at the jungle. Half-an-hour later he rounded a rock and saw a cabin ahead. He approached warily, noticing the profusion of giant blossoms that grew about it. Some were open, others were closed — in various stages of what seemed to be a swallowing operation. As he drew nearer, he saw that the cabin was built of *living* stuff, a network of tightly woven vines and vegetable material that was still attached to the chartreuse jungle.

He paused doubtfully near the doorway, then entered the single room, wondering if the walls would suddenly writhe inward to crush him. But the movements in the jungle-stuff always seemed to be leisurely, probably accomplished by differential growth rather than by muscular action. He sat near the doorway, just out of the rain, and stared up at the cliff-top.

I have no facts for analysis, he thought gloomily. There was no predictability about the situation because he lacked data concerning the life-form, its goals, whims, functions. What were the semantic reactions of a jungle? He could not even call it an intelligent jungle, without anthropomorphism. Its activities, however, seemed somehow related to intelligence.

While he watched the cliff-top a flying thing appeared, soaring high over the jungle, then out of sight over the mesa. Rogan once intimated that their function was that of insect-catcher, but they themselves seemed to have a

illustrator: Virgil Finlay

vague structural relation to insect-forms, and perhaps to bats.

My goal is to get away from here, he thought. But he could not approach the mesa without exposing himself to the insane behavior of the others. Possibly the jungle might use them to kill him.

The flying thing reappeared suddenly, and Rod's belly twisted hard. The thing carried a man in its talons, and it seemed to be struggling to stay aloft. Once over the rim of the cliff, it swooped toward the jungle. Rod darted outside. The creature was bearing its burden down toward the cabin.

The huge wings beat a bass throbbing in the air. He plastered himself against the cliff and held the gun ready while he watched it. The man was Jeffers, and he appeared to be conscious but not struggling.

Kreee kreee kreee . . .

Something moved in the brush near the cabin. A giant blossom stirred, then groped upward — like a young bird opening its maw to receive food. The winged creature dropped toward it. Its burden hung motionless, watching.

Rod's gun barked. The blossom snapped closed, its stem writhing. The insect-bat cried out, then flapped higher with its burden, momentarily confused. Then without warning it dropped out of sight behind the cabin. There was a sickening *urp*. The creature flew upward — alone. Cursing angrily, Rod fired twice. The thing shrieked and crashed against the cliff. It lay at the edge of the brush, one wing twitching slightly. Vines moved slowly about it, seemed to attach themselves to the carcass.

Rod darted around the cabin. There was no sign of Jeffers. Several closed blossoms hung in the foliage, exhibiting various stages of digestion. One of them was still quivering, and it showed no bulge in its stem. Cursing angrily, he wrestled through the entangling foliage and attacked the fat stem with a knife. It proved itself tough as an oak-root. After inserting a fresh clip in his automatic, he cut it nearly through with five shots, wrestling against its slow serpentine movement as it tried to withdraw. He finished it with the knife, then tried to drag the closed blossom away. He tripped and fell headlong. Vines had grown tight about his legs.

He hacked them away with savage haste born of fright, and tugged the cumbersome blossom out into the clear space before the cabin where he began slicing at the tough, leathery hide that held Jeffers imprisoned. The man was not stirring.

At last he had it open, and Jeffers, still folded comfortably in a vaguely foetal position with his eyes closed, began to stir. He opened his eyes and looked around calmly. He picked himself up and

blinked at his surroundings. He appeared completely unconcerned.

"Feel okay, Jeff?" Rod grunted.

The big man failed to answer. He stared along the rim of the jungle, saw a blossom that was open, and made a queer noise in his throat — like an infant gurgling. His big face beamed in a childish smile. He turned and lumbered toward the blossom.

Rod noised a desperate yelp and hit him from behind with a flying tackle, then clubbed him with the gun-butt. Jeffers had a thick skull. He remained stubbornly conscious, rolled over, kicked Esperson in the midsection. Rod went down groaning. Jeffers caught his ankles and began dragging him toward the eagerly waiting blossom, which had snaked toward them and tilted its jaws at a convenient angle.

Rod waited until Jeffers released his ankles to get a better grip; then he stabbed the possessed crewman in the thigh. Jeffers stumbled and crashed in the brush. Rod kicked the awareness out of him, and dragged him back to the clear space. Minutes later, he lay tightly trussed with strips of his own clothing.

Now what to do with him?

He sat down to think. The rain had stopped. The jungle was hissing. He was hungry, but he dared to eat nothing that was available short of the ship's provisions, and he could not reach the ship.

Intuition, strange process of unconscious association and abstraction, he felt its stirrings. Telepathic hypnosis — silver cranial section — screening — hunger — food — Johnny's cooking — pots and pans — metal — the problem of Jeffers —

He grunted suddenly, arose and stalked back inside the cabin. There in the corner was a small chemical heat-unit taken from the first launch. There also was a set of telescoping aluminum pots. The idea seemed too ridiculously easy and obvious, but so were most ideas of any value. He separated the pots, chose one about head-size, and went out to try it on Jeffers' recently assaulted skull.

After a little beating and shaping with the gun-butt, he made it a fair fit, punched a couple of holes, and tied it over Jeffers' cranium like a helmet. The man was groaning, but still not conscious. Rod sat down to wait.

The jungle had become a steam-world, and the vapor obscured the cliff-top like a gray shroud. He noticed that the only path of direct ascent and descent, without skirting the mesa, was a tangled ladder of vines. But one glance at it was enough to satisfy him that it was useless to him. The ladder was alive, and certainly capable of

pulling loose and collapsing when he was half-way up.

He thought of Johnny — and remembered what Rogan said about insect catchers, and a single animal that lived in the jungle. Evidently Johnny was the animal, living in symbiosis with the single vegetable form. Johnny Three at first — and Six made nine. And ten made nineteen, if the creature could manage it.

Had the jungle itself devoured the original lost crewmen — and given birth to a complex organism built as a composite synthesis of the three? Such speculation was pure guesswork, involving undefined terms, and perhaps meaningless formulations. Still, lacking facts, he pursued it. Were nine men still somehow alive in Johnny? That was nonsense, for consciousness changed, moment by moment, so that Yesterday's Esperson was not the same man as Today's Esperson, but bound to his past-person only by memory of experience.

The only faintly reasonable hypothesis that he could formulate was that in consuming an animal organism, the jungle so completely analyzed its micro-structure that it even understood the significance of patterns imbedded in the tissue, comprehending the bio-chemistry of memory and consciousness, so that it could duplicate portions of the psychophysiological structure, the duplication implying a similarity of consciousness and function. Facts were too scarce for such guesswork. But he urgently needed some sort of hypothesis as a tentative guide for action.

Jeffers began to come awake. He stirred in his bonds and moaned. His eyes fluttered open and groped for something to cling to. They found the jungle, and the moan became a gurgle of fright.

"Jeff! Snap to!"

The eyes found Rod. Saneness returned slowly. He muttered a foul oath and it seemed to restore his confidence. He strained at his bonds, choked, and reddened angrily.

"How about it, Jeff!" Rod snapped.

"Huh? Get me out of this mess!" the man growled.

"You know where you are and what happened?"

The struggling subsided. He looked around again, saw the jungle-flowers and shuddered.

"Some kind of damn dream!"

"Uh-uh, pal. You did it."

Jeffers shook his head. His mind refused the datum.

"I couldn't!"

"You could and did. If you didn't, how would I know what you dreamed?"

"Huh?"

"About the — flying thing and the flower."

His expression went wild again.

He struggled. His helplessness seemed to induce nausea. He closed his eyes and fell back in a state of shock.

"Start telling me what happened!" Rod demanded, shaking him hard.

"Huh?"

"What went on inside you? Damn it, we've got to get facts."

Jeffers shuddered. "I can't."

"You can, and bigawd you *will!* If you want to live. What's the matter? Memories 're nasty?"

"Jeez!" Jeffers shuddered, clenched his eyes closed, and began babbling disjointed nonsense — phrases and impressions and ugly memory images, like a man in narco-hypnosis.

Rod listened carefully, occasionally encouraging him with a brief utterance of attention. The babble made a little sense, by reason of its content.

". . . a big soft smother, all wet . . . giant came angry and rough . . . need hungry poison . . . roared and ruins me with sharp thing . . . soggy strangle . . . hurts because I wanted hurts . . ."

Rod frowned thoughtfully. The man had been only half-aware of his surroundings during the possession. His thoughts had been infantile, and controlled apparently by a force that caused the things that he perceived to appear identical to memory images from other ages of his life. The blossom — it became a mother, affectionately muzzling an infant, murmuring, cooing: "I could just eat you *up!*" The perceptions became more than symbols, became identities — while somehow the whole man remained externally rational.

He was too absorbed in listening to the disjointed babble, and he failed to hear the thing come down the ladder of vines behind him — until it walked across the clearing and spoke.

"Pleathe don't move, Ethperthon."

He stiffened. "*Johnny!*"

"I have a gun aimed at your back. Turn around thlowly."

Rod turned rapidly — with a snarl. The chubby man retreated a step, and the gun moved threateningly. He showed no ill effects for having been shot through abdomen and skull. What the jungle created, it could restore. He started to his feet.

"Behave aggrethively, and you die, Lieutenant. Cooperate, and you live — forever." His large eyes were fanatic green pools of determination.

He hesitated. "What do you want me to do?"

"Firtht — lift Jefferth into — the Flower." He said "Flower" as a mystic might say "Gate of Heaven".

Rod stared at him distastefully and spat. He glanced up at the fog shrouding the cliff-top. "And

then climb in one myself, I guess, huh?"

"Yeth. That followth."

"Why? Why do you want it? Why does — the jungle want it?"

Johnny paused, frowning impatiently. "How elth could we know what you know?"

So that was it! The jungle learned by ingestion, gathered information through its feeding process. Its books were organisms, full of memory-images and learned data — and the jungle was literally hungry for knowledge, and perhaps for the memory-experiences of the devoured animal.

"You don't want Jeffers," he said. "Everything *he* knows is wrong."

The big man mumbled on the ground.

"Lift him into the Flower, Lieutenant!" Johnny snapped.

"Wait! We can make some kind of a —"

"There'th no *need* for a deal. I have the gun."

"But there's a way you can have your cake —"

"And eat it too?" The chartreuse-gray composite smiled wryly. "Exactly what we *are* doing, Lieutenant! Now Jefferth, pleathe."

Grimly resigned, to all external appearances, Rod knelt beside Jeffers and reached for the knife.

"Leave him tied!" Johnny ordered.

"I can't lift him. I'll have to cut his feet loose."

"Very well, but not hith handth."

Jeffers was cursing fluently. When his feet were free, he kicked out savagely, and his boot grazed Rod's skull. The lieutenant sprawled away, clutching his head and moaning, hoping that Rogan's knowledge of the silver plate had been transferred to Johnny.

"Get up, Lieutenant."

Rod collapsed, feigning a dead faint. After a moment, he heard Jeffers come to his feet and start running. A shot exploded. Jeffers howled. Rod opened his eyes. Jeffers was sitting a dozen yards away, looking dazed. His leg was bleeding, and the helmet had been torn from his head. He tried to get up, but the leg collapsed. Johnny started toward him. Rod reached quietly for his gun, which he had dropped when Johnny stole up behind him.

He took careful aim; the gun bucked in his hand. The creature of the jungle sprawled, with the top of his head gone.

Rod darted forward and clamped the battered pot back over Jeffers' head. "Did it get you again?" he panted.

"Starting to," the wounded man wheezed.

Rod freed his hands and glanced at the wound. The thigh muscles were torn badly but the bone not broken. He applied a belt as a

tourniquet. "Think you can walk with help?"

"Where?"

"Back around the mesa. It'll be dark soon. We'll have to get back in the launch without the others seeing us."

"I guess I can walk." Jeffers stood up, whitened and swayed, but remained standing.

"One thing to take care of first," Rod growled. He strode to the fallen Johnny. The wandering vines were already creeping into an exploring knot about the shattered skull.

He hit the pin from an incendiary grenade, tucked it under Johnny's neck, and backed away. Five seconds later, a blinding blue-white light peeped out, lingered and grew, spewing sickening smoke. If the jungle wanted Johnny fixed, she'd have to make a new one. There wouldn't be much left to repair.

Twilight was fading into darkness when they reached the north slope, and Jeffers was near collapse. They paused to rest, peering up at the ridge, half expecting a demon-possessed posse led by Isaacs to come charging down upon them. But the blackness of night stole over them and there was no sign of activity from the mesa.

"How many guys were left up there when that, that bat-thing picked you up? Can you remember?"

Jeffers tried to think. "Let's see — I think — we started with nine, didn't we?"

"Ten, Pal — you're still affected."

"Ten — that's right. Well I believe there were — four left."

Rod groaned. "There may not be any now." He climbed to his feet and helped the wounded Jeffers up. They moved slowly and quietly up the ridge. Giant wings drummed somewhere above them in the blackness, tracking their movements with some strange sense. The jungle still watched, threatened, brooded in sullen, hungry anger.

They reached the crest of the ridge, but only blackness lay ahead. Rod heaved another grenade to light the mesa, and watched its gleaming flare illuminate emptiness. Nothing but the launches remained.

"Maybe they're in one of the ships."

"Don't think so," Jeffers grunted. "That damn — whatever it is — can't get hold of you as well through the hull."

After thinking about it for a moment, Rod decided that it was peculiar that the hypnotic effect could reach through the hull at all. But obviously it had, to some extent. Perhaps the shielding effect of metal depended on closeness of fit.

They advanced warily across

the vine-covered ground, expecting ambush. They stole close to Launch Two, listened at the airlock, heard nothing. Rod dragged himself quietly inside.

"Nobody here."

They tried the other launch with similar result.

"We're alone, Jeffers."

The crewman was near collapse. Rod helped him in Launch Two, found a medical kit, and dressed the leg-wound. He spent the rest of the night working on the launch, using the other ship as a parts bank. When the communicator was repaired, he tried calling the Archangel — with no results. The starship's orbit had evidently carried it below the horizon again.

The repairs were nearly complete, but fatigue compelled him to pause for food and sleep. He made certain that the airlock was securely bolted, then went to collapse in a corner in utter exhaustion.

Jeffers shook him awake. Gray daylight poured gloomily through the ports.

"Wake up, Lieutenant! There's a guy coming across from the cliff —"

He groaned. "Johnny again!"

"Uh-uh! It's Richards — only he's slightly green."

"*Who!*" Rod sat up quickly.

"Richards — the first guy to disappear from Launch One!"

"It *can't* be!"

"Look for yourself."

Rod bounded to a port and peered out at the gray day, and at the solitary figure who walked solemnly toward them.

"It *is* Richards — in body, anyhow." He went to the airlock, gun in hand, and unbolted it. The lock slid open. Richards stopped.

"Really, old man! There's no need for the gun," he called.

Rod took note of the gray-green discoloration of his skin and shuddered. "Uh-uh! You stay back, Jungle-boy!"

Richards' forehead creased irritably. "That any way to greet an old friend, Esp? I say! Let me in."

"Jungle tricks! You can't be alive."

"Ridiculous! I'm here, am I not?"

English accent and all, he was there — but for all Rod knew, Johnny might have been the spit'n image of one of the original Crusoes to be marooned here. He kept the gun trained at Richards' midsection.

"Suppose you explain your existence," he snapped.

"It's quite simple. I merely got ripe, Esperson."

"Got *what?*"

"Got ripe — R-I-P-E — as in ripe tomato."

"You mean —!"

"Exactly. I woke up inside one of those silly gourd-fruit. I kicked my way out, and here I am."

"As a substitute for Johnny?"

"Not at all. I am *I* — tch! But that lacks sense. How shall I say it? I remember being me before — well, it all happened."

"You mean the jungle swallowed you —"

"It seems to have taken me apart and put me back together again."

"Anything missing?" Rod grunted sourly.

"As a matter of fact — *yes*. It forgot my navel."

"You don't need it. Jeffers?"

"Yeah, Lieutenant?"

"Get a shot of pentothal out of the kit. Give him a dose — enough to knock him out. We'll haul him aboard and tie him up. Commission would probably like a look at the life-forms from this planet."

Richards sputtered angrily, but submitted when Jeffers let himself down to the ground and hobbled toward him with a hypodermic. Rod listed to his irritable protests, and found himself becoming half convinced.

"I kinda believed the guy, Lieutenant," Jeffers panted as they hauled the limp crewman through the lock.

Esperson remained doubtful. "If it's true, how come there weren't three guys here when Rogan's launch landed?"

"Maybe they're around. Or, maybe they died."

"Yeah."

He went to the communicator and tried another call: "Archangel from Launch Two. Give me a call. Over."

The response was feeble but immediate. "Isaacs from Allenby, Isaacs from Allenby. Read you S-2 but clear. We'd about given you up. What happened? Over."

Esperson breathed a sigh of relief. "This is Rod, Al. Isaacs isn't here. No time to explain. We'll rendezvous on schedule, but we may have to come down here again to pick up stragglers — if any. Over."

There was a pause. Then Allenby relayed the Archangel's position and velocity data for rendezvous purposes. Rod felt Jeffers nudging him.

"Lieutenant! There's another one coming."

"I'll call you later, Al!" he said to the mike, then bracketed it and stepped to the lock.

"Elvin!"

"Yeah, the second guy missing."

"Load him aboard the same way. We take no chances."

An hour later, the launch's rockets sputtered, coughed a blue haze, then spurted an incandescent blast that lifted it as a skyward arrow. Richards and Elvin lay trussed securely in the rear of the ship.

"I never believed we'd make it, Lieutenant," Jeffers sighed, relaxing for the first time.

(*Continued on page 160*)

illustrator: David Stone

FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE

By Sam Martinez

DEATH CERTIFICATE

NAME: Crumm, Clarissa **DATE:** July 9, 1950

PLACE OF RESIDENCE: Princeton Arms Apartments, Apt. 14B
Chicago, Cook County, Illinois

DATE OF BIRTH: November 20, 1902

DATE OF DEATH: July 4, 1950

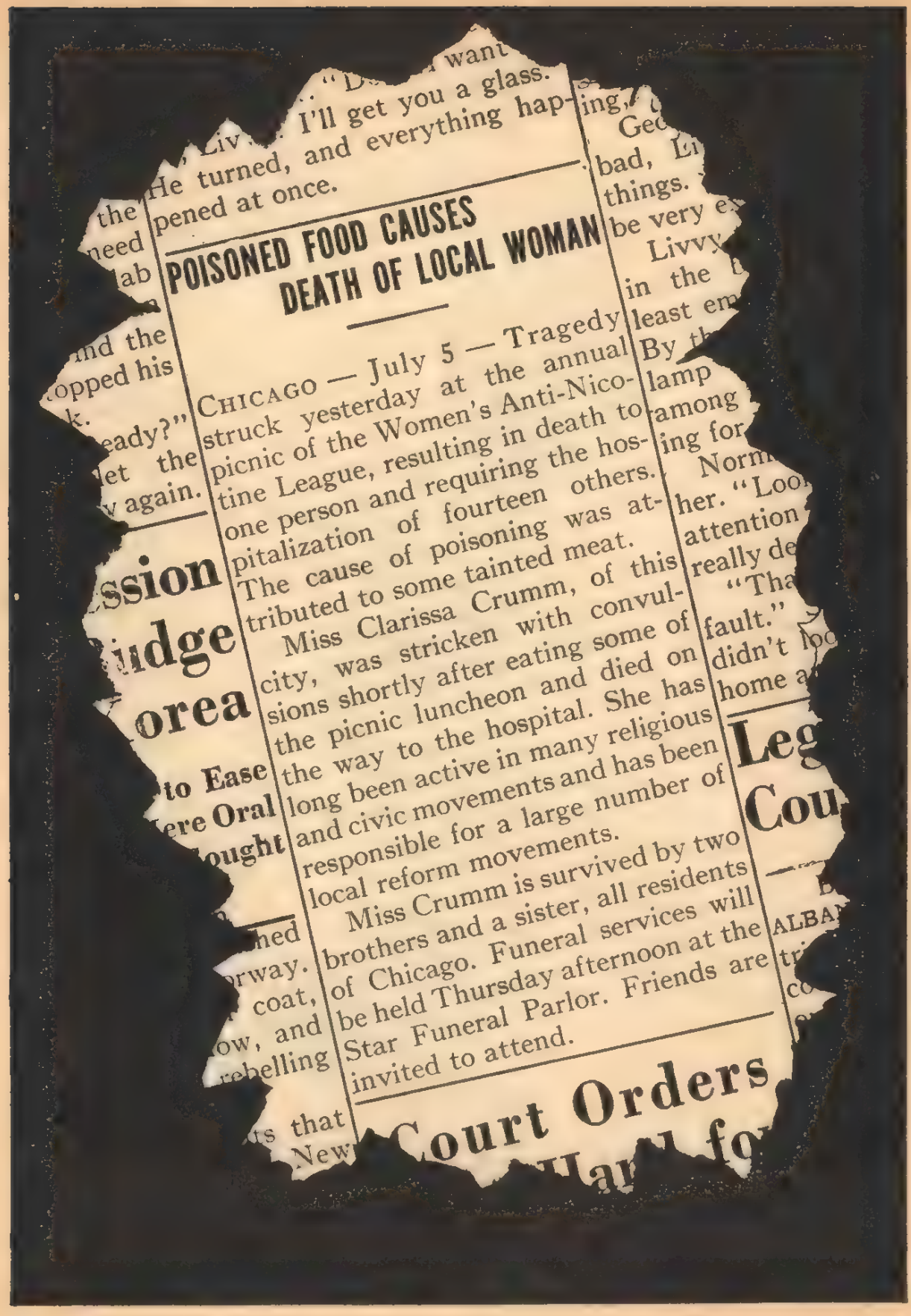
CLASSIFICATION: Accidental death **TIME OF DEATH:** 4:27 P.M.

MARITAL STATUS: Single **SEX:** Female **RACE:** White

PHYSICIAN IN ATTENDANCE: Dr. R. J. Bacon, M.D.

IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF DEATH: Ptomaine poisoning
(See attached autopsy report.)

CERTIFIED BY: Carl Stubbs, County Coroner



He turned, and everything happened at once.

I'll get you a glass.

POISONED FOOD CAUSES DEATH OF LOCAL WOMAN

CHICAGO — July 5 — Tragedy struck yesterday at the annual picnic of the Women's Anti-Nicotine League, resulting in death to one person and requiring the hospitalization of fourteen others. The cause of poisoning was attributed to some tainted meat.

Miss Clarissa Crumm, of this city, was stricken with convulsions shortly after eating some of the picnic luncheon and died on the way to the hospital. She has long been active in many religious and civic movements and has been responsible for a large number of local reform movements.

Miss Crumm is survived by two brothers and a sister, all residents of Chicago. Funeral services will be held Thursday afternoon at the Star Funeral Parlor. Friends are invited to attend.

Court Orders

APPLICATION FOR ADMISSION TO THE HEAVENLY DOMAIN

Applicant: Miss Clarissa Crumm *Classification:* Mortal from earth.
Occupation: Author, lecturer, and reformist.
Religious affiliations: Christian faith — Protestant creed.
Other activities: Organization for the Suppression of Vice, Holy Temperance Union, Women's Anti-Nicotine League, Civic Committee for the Control of Comic Books, Board of Stewards —Hallelujah Rescue Mission, Chairman — Local Slum Clearance Committee, Women's Spiritual Uplift Society, Foreign Missionary Alliance, etc.
Remarks: I have always lived a pure Christian life beyond reproach and devoted to serving my fellow man, and I know of no reason why I should not be admitted to my just reward.

Signed — CLARISSA CRUMM

APPROVAL SLIP

RECORDS OFFICE

Re: Clarissa Crumm File: QD 679,331,095
Book: 7,472,621
Page: 79,325 to 79,336

This applicant has recorded an unusually disciplined life, primarily dedicated to the correction and reformation of others. Somewhat fanatical regarding church work and reform movements. No disqualifying sins on record.

Ariel,
Recording Angel

ASSIGNMENT OF DUTIES

Subject: Miss Clarissa Crumm

Your application for admission to the Heavenly Kingdom has been received and approved and you are hereby authorized to partake of the joys of the hereafter.

You have been assigned to Section ZP-847 of the heavenly choir and will report promptly for

rehearsal and training. Your present celestial duties will be to sing praises and make heavenly music.

Amen!

St. Peter,
Keeper of the Portals

STORES REQUISITION

White robe size 32.....one only
Wings medium size.....one pair
Halo size 6½.....one only
Harp 24 carat.....one only

Received: Clarissa Crumm

Saint Peter
Keeper of the Portals
Most Revered Sir:

I hope you will not think that I am dissatisfied, but a matter has come to my attention of which you are undoubtedly unaware. I was quite overjoyed on being assigned to the heavenly chorus, but after joining with them for the past several weeks, I find I rather question their choice of music.

It seems to me that in place of the fine, stately anthems of old, the choir is indulging in a great deal of modern music, entirely out of keeping with the sacred mission of the group. There appears to be a distressing tendency toward modernistic timing and chords, in fact this afternoon we practiced an arrangement of the ''Hallelujah Chorus'' which was definitely syncopated.

I have brought this to the attention of the heavenly choirmaster, but Gabriel seems to view the situation with considerable levity. In fact he went so far as to state that ''. . . there's nothing like

a few hot licks to make these angels jump up and start shouting Glory!'' I must admit I was profoundly shocked and I am appealing to you to take the proper steps in remedying this deplorable situation. It seems to me that this Gabriel should be relieved of his duties as heavenly music master and someone more conservative and with greater respect for the dignity of his office, be appointed to replace him.

Sincerely yours,

Clarissa Crumm

My dear Miss Crumm:

Your recent complaint has been received and is being thoroughly investigated. Please feel free at any time to submit any further suggestions or recommendations you may have for improving the efficiency of the heavenly mansions. You may rest assured that they will receive our utmost consideration.

St. Peter,
Keeper of the Portals

MEMORANDUM

To: Gabriel
From: St. Peter

Gabe, you old reprobate, what have you been up to? I just had a woman up here in my office raising Holy Ned over your choir directing. She was telling me you used a boogie-woogie harp background on one of your hymns. Not that I give two whoops how you conduct your chorus, being tone deaf myself, but she has also turned in a formal, written complaint and I am duty-bound to investigate. What's the score?

Peter

MEMORANDUM

To: St. Peter
From: Gabriel

Honestly, Pete, I'm about to go nuts! That Crumm woman has been in my hair ever since you assigned her to the heavenly choir. She doesn't like our arrangements, she doesn't like the way I direct, in fact she even objects to the way I toot my horn! The other day we tried out some new variations on an old Negro spiritual and she practically threw a fit. Said our music was sacrilegious, degrading and immoral, just because it had a little rhythm to it. I've been choirmaster for a good many centuries and this is the first time anybody has ever tried to tell me how I ought to run my chorus. If you can possibly manage it, get her out of my choir before she ruins it, and me too!

Gabriel

My dear Miss Crumm:

This is to inform you that effective as of this date you will be relieved of any further duties with the heavenly choir. For the present you will be unassigned and until further notice you may spend your time in meditation and prayer. Peace be with you.

St. Peter,
Keeper of the Portals

Saint Peter
Keeper of the Portals

Most Honored Sir:

I am sure it is your desire as well as mine to see the Heavenly Kingdom the dominion of honor and glory which it should be. Therefore, I am sure you will welcome a few suggestions and observations I have made since being relieved of choral duty.

It is my opinion that there is a regrettable lack of respect shown among the angels and even by many of the saints. After all, this is a holy sanctuary and should have no place for levity or idleness.

Far too much time is spent in merrymaking that should be devoted to prayer and meditation. All inconsequential gaiety and laughter should be banned and the residents of Heaven forced to assume an attitude more in keeping with the serious nature of holy respect.

I have observed, especially among some of the younger residents, a frightful callousness toward the proper dignity and beauty of the divine kingdom and I believe this should be brought to their attention by means of an edict abolishing all unbecoming merriment and diversion. This, I feel, is of the utmost importance.

Also I believe that an ordinance should be put into effect requiring greater consideration toward personal appearance among the angelic hosts. Too many halos are being worn tilted rakishly to the side of the head, and many of the wings are quite ragged and unkempt along the edges. If we are worthy of being called angels, then we should see to it that our personal appearance and demeanor are in accordance with our station.

Sincerely yours,

Clarissa Crumm

My dear Miss Crumm:

Your complaints regarding heavenly laughter have been given due consideration. While it is my own personal opinion that joy and happiness are pleasing in the sight of the Supreme Being, unfortunately I am powerless to enact any such regulations as you suggest. Your recommendations will be

passed on to the Divine Council for consideration and possible action.

St. Peter,
Keeper of the Portals

MEMORANDUM

To: St. Peter
From: The Divine Council

Request denied! Don't waste our time with such stuff!

Moses

My dear Miss Crumm:

It has come to my attention, through numerous complaints from various heavenly residents, that you have been indulging in considerable evangelical activity of late. I am forced to remind you that all of the souls up here have already been saved or they would not be here, and it is quite unnecessary to ask them to repent their sins since they have none.

Also, I understand you have been rather free with your personal criticisms and comments. All such complaints should be submitted to this office in writing. In conclusion, may I remind you that tolerance is one of the great Christian virtues, quite frequently overlooked?

St. Peter,
Keeper of the Portals

Saint Peter
Keeper of the Portals

Dear Sir:

In reply to your recent note, I can only say that I think you are doing a mighty poor job of regulating heavenly activities. I must confess I have been deeply moved by the lack of order and respect here in Paradise, and I feel strongly that

some steps should be taken to rectify these scandalous conditions.

Angels are allowed to come and go as they please, with absolutely no check on their actions. They can gorge themselves practically into insensibility with ambrosia and nectar, without concern from the so-called governing authorities. Singing, dancing and similar earthly pleasures are permitted, even at the foot of the golden throne. There is absolutely no provision made for the proper observance of Sunday, such as special services or retreat. In fact, the heavenly host are at perfect liberty to do anything they desire, without let or hindrance. How can you possibly expect to maintain purity in heaven with no laws to enforce it?

You say that I should submit all criticisms to you, in writing. May I remind you that in the past I have turned in suggestions for improvements, and to the best of my knowledge they have been entirely ignored. If you will do nothing about these things, then I will appeal to some higher authority who will take an interest in the welfare of his heavenly subjects.

Yours,
Clarissa Crumm

MEMORANDUM

To: Moses
From: St. Peter

I have a problem I wish you would take up at your next Council meeting. There is a woman who came up here recently who has been giving me all kinds of trouble. She doesn't like the way we do things, she wants to change everything, she's very unhappy and she's making everyone else the same way. In fact, if something isn't done about her pretty soon, I'm about ready to throw up my job!

Peter

MEMORANDUM

To: St. Peter
From: Moses

It can't be as bad as all that! If the lady has troubles, send her up before the next Council meeting and we'll take care of her.

Moses

(*Excerpts from the minutes of the Divine Council meeting*)

MOSES: What is the next item on the agenda?

PAUL: A Miss Clarissa Crumm. From what Peter tells me, she is completely dissatisfied with the way Heaven is being run.

JOHN: A radical, eh? This ought to be interesting.

MOSES: Bring her in. . . . How do you do, Miss Crumm? I understand you have a complaint which you wish to present to this Council.

MISS CRUMM: I most certainly have! I think there is altogether too much laxity in controlling the morals of the heavenly host. Male and female angels are allowed to intermingle freely with absolutely no provision for regulating their behavior. Who knows what may be going on behind some of these cloud banks?

MOSES: I am sure, Miss Crumm, we are all above such petty temptations.

MISS CRUMM: Well, I'm not so sure. With temptations all about, sooner or later even the strongest angel will yield.

MOSES: Have you any ideas for eliminating such temptations?

MISS CRUMM: Why, it's the easiest thing in the Universe. All you have to do is to segregate the two sexes and assign them to separate, specific sections of the Heavenly Kingdom.

MOSES: I'm afraid that would be impossible. Unless you have a more practical idea I'm afraid we must turn down your request.

MISS CRUMM: Very well then, if that's the way you feel about it, I think that the least you could do would be to issue a divine decree to the effect that all inhabitants of Heaven, without exception, be required to wear undergarments.

MOSES: What was that!

MISS CRUMM: You know . . . underwear! I think it's simply disgraceful! These flimsy robes we are provided with are altogether inadequate to properly clothe ourselves with. I have never seen such a disregard for the simple proprieties. How do you expect any man to keep his mind on higher things when some giddy little female

nearby is throwing her . . . well, exposing herself! And these cherubs running around without a stitch of clothing — it's shameful!

MOSES: I don't think our robes are so indecent.

MISS CRUMM: You don't? Well, just look at yourself! Maybe you think that hairy chest is becoming, but I find it positively revolting!

MOSES: Harrumph! Maybe you're right. I'm sure the Council will give full consideration to your proposal.

MISS CRUMM: Well, they'd better. I'm getting tired of all this talk and no action. If something isn't done, and soon, I'll take steps to do something about it myself!

MOSES: I'm sure that won't be necessary. Elijah, would you see Miss Crumm out? . . . See what I mean?

JOHN: Good heavens! How long has this been going on?

MOSES: Too long. All the angels in her section are getting dissatisfied, St. Peter is threatening to quit, and now I understand she has just organized a group known as "The Society for the Purification and Advancement of Heaven." It seems to have widespread appeal,too. She is threatening an uprising unless some positive action is taken on the numerous reforms she is advocating. Gentlemen, we are facing a crisis! Never in the history of Heaven has there been a situation similar to this. Has anyone any suggestions?

NOAH: I move the entire issue be presented to the Supreme Being.

LUKE: Second the motion.

MOSES: Motion has been made and seconded, all those in favor signify by saying Aye. (Unanimous ballot) So be it!

MEMO: To the Divine Council

Have reviewed the Crumm case. Cannot understand dissatisfaction in Heaven. Suggest rechecking Miss Crumm's earthly record.

Jehovah

MEMORANDUM

To: Moses

From: Recording Angel

Have rechecked the record of Miss Clarissa Crumm very carefully, as requested, but find no notation indicating commitment of any major sin. Most serious breach of conduct occurred during a closed meeting of the executive committee of the

Total Abstinence Society. In order to observe the degrading influence of spirituous beverages, the ladies drank up a gallon of blackberry wine and, putting it mildly, got stinko!

Ariel

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED, insofar as it has been determined that Miss Clarissa Crumm, during her earthly career, did willfully indulge in certain practices known or advocated to be sinful, thereby becoming guilty of deceit and dissembling; it being further self-evident that under such circumstances her admission to Paradise was an unfortunate error; it is the unanimous decision of the Divine Council of Heaven that immediate action be taken for the good of the heavenly community, to transfer Miss Crumm to the region of everlasting fire and torment.

INTER-OFFICE MEMO

To: His Divine Majesty
From: His Satanic Majesty

Thanks a lot, chum, for the wench you transferred down here recently. At first I thought you were running a little off the beam, but I've got to admit you knew what you were doing. The old gal has never been so happy in her whole life! With all the condemned sinners we've got down here, she's been having a great time showing them the error of their ways and warning them to repent of their sins. It's amazing! We ran an efficiency check last week and found that the proportional intensity of torment has increased 37% since her arrival. In fact, I have just appointed her as my first assistant. If you ever run across any more choice specimens like Miss Crumm, be sure and send them down. Maybe some day I can return the favor.

Warmest regards,

Lucifer

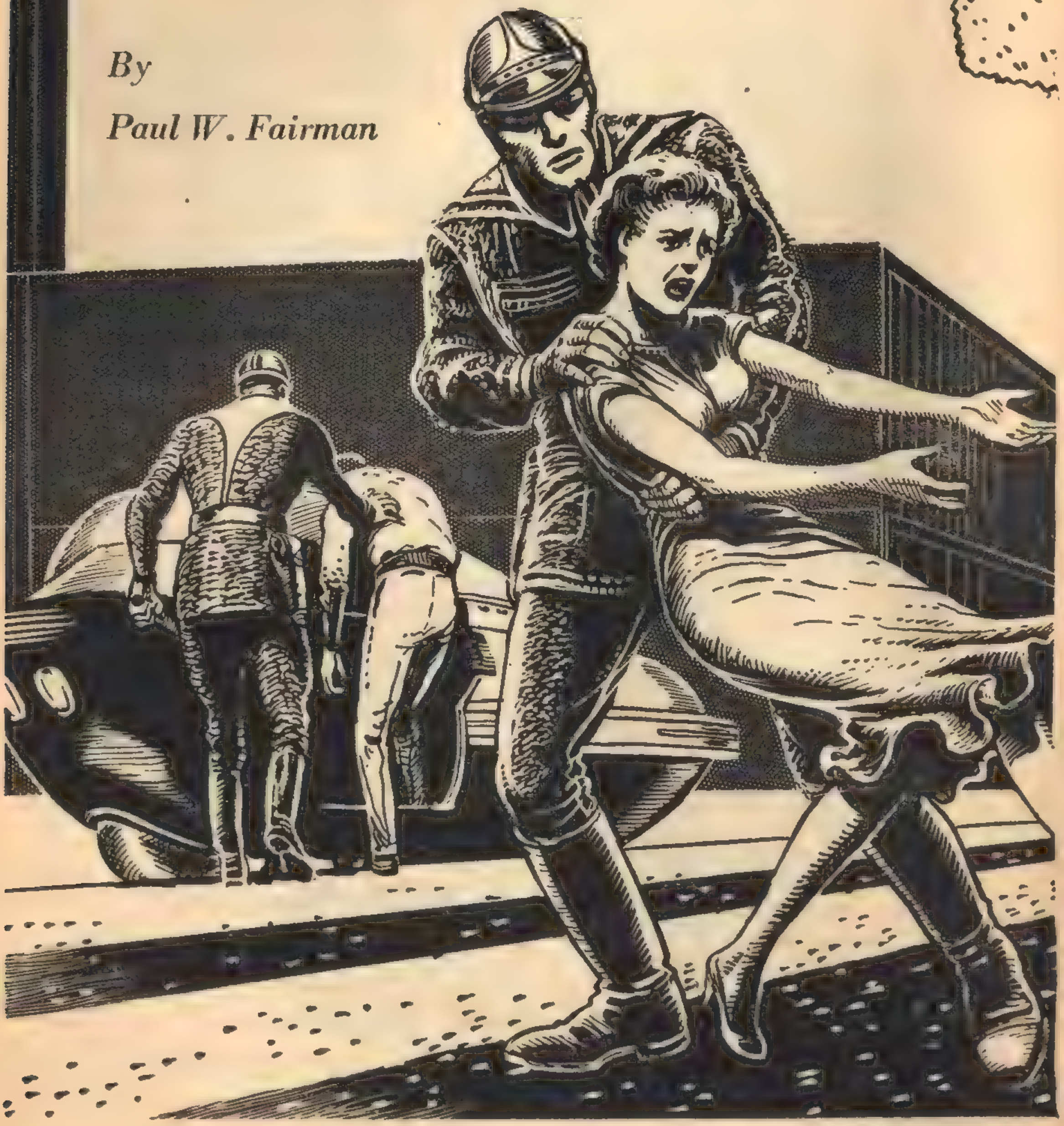
"Young man, this is *not* the smoking compartment"

From The London Mystery Magazine, published at 221b Baker Street, London N.W.1, the address of Sherlock Holmes Esquire

"SOME DAY they'll give us guns"

By

Paul W. Fairman



illustrator: Ed Emsler

One of the more reliable plots in science-fiction is the invasion of Earth by alien hordes from outer space — an enemy so far in advance of our science that an atomic pile is something they give their kids for Christmas. This, of course, puts mankind in about the position of the Zulu Marching and Chowder Club as compared to the AEC.

It all sounds pretty grim, we'll admit. But so far the only indication that it might happen is a flying saucer here and there. And even if it should come to pass, take heart: Paul Fairman says we'll get by. It seems we've got a secret weapon that even the Martians can't handle!

DON'T gulp your food, dear. Please. You're not in that much of a hurry."

Johnny Carrol didn't answer his mother. He went right on bolting his breakfast. His mother sat across the table watching him, and his father stood by the window looking out into the street.

His father asked, "What are you planning for today, Johnny?" Asked it with a careful selection of words and tone; a caution which had become commonplace among parents since the invasion from space.

Johnny took his time about answering. "Curly and Bob and me ——"

"Curly and Bob and *I*, dear."

Johnny frowned at his mother. "The three of us came out on top of our class. The highest marks. So we get a day off from school."

"But darling — you didn't tell us. I'm — I'm very proud of you." Helen Carrol spoke quickly, bit-

ing her lip at the end of the sentence.

"It wasn't anything," Johnny said. "Even the little kids on Septos do better."

Helen Carrol started to speak, but her husband cut her off. What with the strict regulations relative to parents' control over their children, it was so easy to make a mistake. Even the mildest criticism . . .

Frank Carrol walked slowly toward the breakfast table. "I probably won't be here when you come back, Johnny."

"Frank — Frank! Please!"

"I've been told to report to Divisional Control today. It seems the Septonians have dug up an old book I wrote on child psychology."

"One of the Counselors is going to spend the whole day with us," Johnny said. "His name is Barchard and — and he's swell. Just swell."

"Did you hear what I said, Johnny? *Divisional Control*."

The boy got up from the table with that cold, impersonal look he'd developed during the previous two years — since the Septonians had come across the galaxy and had taken Earth over with all their might and science. Frank Carrol's fists were tight in his pockets as he watched his son stop in the doorway to say, "I won't be home for dinner — and don't wait supper. I may be pretty late."

The door closed. Frank Carrol whispered, "Goodbye, son," and then he was standing close to his wife while she sobbed into the folds of his dressing gown.

The sobbing quieted and she whispered: "Don't go, darling. Don't go! Run — run away and hide! Others have!"

He stroked her head absently, his eyes on the closed door. "But only to be caught like rats. With no weapons but our bare hands. . . ." His thought trend changed. His voice came huskier: "He's a good boy still. They haven't changed him as much as some of the others."

"Darling! Please run away."

"No. I'll report as ordered. There's no other way to do."

Johnny Carrol raced down the block to Curly Dale's house and found Sam Dale standing on the porch. Sam not doing anything. Just standing there looking into space.

"Where's Curly?"

"He'll be out in a minute, I imagine." Dale's look was flat, empty, impersonal. He reached slowly into his pocket for a cigarette.

"Tell him I'm here."

But that wasn't necessary because Curly came pelting out of the house. "Hi! I'm ready. Let's go." They ran off down the street side by side, not bothering to say goodbye.

The two boys found Bob Brown waiting for them, slamming his front gate back and forth until the fence shook. Bob fell in beside them. They ran until they came to the stone wall along the south side of the park and each of them sailed over it with a high leap. Clearing it by a foot and then dashing right on to the fountain where Barchard was waiting.

Gasping for breath, Johnny asked, "Did you see that jump I made? I'll bet that's how they do it on Septo!"

Curly hung panting on the edge of the fountain. "Nuts! That wasn't like Septo. Only like some slew-footed Earthman!" And to Barchard: "Did you see my jump?"

The Septonians bred magnificent men. Barchard was six-and-a-half feet tall, broad, bronzed, perfectly proportioned. His teeth, white and even, showed in an engaging grin. "All the jumps were good. You fellows'll make it yet."

"You were going to knock out some flies for us," Bob said. "Remember? You told us yesterday you'd hit some."

"Sure," Barchard replied. "You didn't think I'd let you down, did you? When did I ever forget a promise to you guys?"

Barchard had brought along a baseball bat and half a dozen balls. He laid the bat on his shoulder and squinted off over the housetops.

"Knock it clear over the sun," Curly demanded fervently.

Barchard continued to grin. "That wouldn't be hard. You haven't got much of a sun in this System."

"You're telling us," Bob agreed. "It's a lot bigger on Septo, ain't it?"

"A great big blue one," Johnny said. "Three, four times the size of that little old yellow one."

Barchard said, "You fellows'll see that and lots more."

"Oh boy!"

"Shut up and let Barchard sock the balls."

Barchard tossed up one of the baseballs and swung the bat in a lazy arc. A sound like a pistol crack and the ball shot upward, a white streak which had hardly begun arcing when it went out of sight. Barchard squinted after it. "Not so good. Didn't hit it square."

The three boys whistled in unison. "Not so *good!* Septonians can do everything better than Earthlings. Gosh!"

"Don't worry. You boys are coming along fine." Barchard sent the other five balls higher and farther into the clear blue sky. When he finished he dropped the bat, and again the engaging grin. "Think the Yankees could use a few Septonians on their team?"

"The Yankees?" Curly asked. "Who are they?" And everybody laughed.

After that they all had a drink at the fountain and Barchard said, "Well, what'll it be, boys? This is your day, you know. Just name it."

"How about the Space Museum?" Curly asked. "All the ships and guns and things from Septos. You can tell us about them?"

Bob Brown was agreeable. "Oh boy! That'll be swell!"

Barchard's easy smile was a part of him. "How about you, Johnny?"

"Well . . . I kind of had another idea." He looked up from the ground in shy admiration at the huge Septonian. "You see, I learned to do something — all by myself — and I wanted to show you. Couldn't we go out for a hike in the woods?"

"I think that would be a good idea," Barchard said. "I'll get a lunch and we'll have a picnic. And then I'll tell you some more things about Septos you don't know."

Curly jumped into the air and clicked his heels. "What are we waiting for? Let's go."

Barchard stopped at a commissary and came out with a big lunch basket. He put it into the trunk of his car and then they drove ten miles out of the city, parked the car and began hiking along the river.

They'd traveled several miles before they reached the place where Curly fell and turned his ankle. The boy emitted a yelp of pain, whereupon Barchard turned sharply. "What was the first rule I taught you?"

"A Septonian laughs at pain," the three boys replied in unison.

Barchard smiled. "That's right." He set down the lunch basket. "Let's have a look at it."

The three boys watched him in mute admiration as he worked deftly with Curly's ankle. After a while he straightened. "There. It won't bother you now."

It was amazing the things every Septonian knew. Their knowledge-norm so far exceeded that of Earthlings that they were regarded by the youth of Earth as supermen.

"Gosh," Curly marvelled. "All the pain's gone."

Barchard's smile. "Of course. You'll learn how to do things like that. How about lunch?"

The three boys were ready to pitch in. For a while nothing was said. Not until Barchard asked, "By the way — how are your parents behaving? Anything to report?"

"Naw," Curly said. "My mom and dad — they let me alone. They know better than to tell me what to do."

"My folks don't even ask where I'm going any more," Bob said, his mouth full of chicken.

Johnny put down half a sandwich and looked at Barchard.

"It's funny," he mused. "How come they can't see things the way us kids can? Why do they have to learn the hard way? You'd think they'd be able to see that you Septonians know so much more than we do — that they're way behind the times."

Barchard explained it in an almost fatherly tone. "It's because they're too old to learn and too stubborn to admit their ways are wrong. That's why we had to pass the laws to keep them from poisoning the minds of kids like you."

Johnny picked up his sandwich again. "I've learned an awful lot in the last two years."

"That sentiment is a sign of weakness?" Barchard prompted.

"That's right. And that if I work hard and study and learn, you Septonians'll teach me all you know."

"So we can have guns sometime," Curly said, "and go out and help you conquer other planets."

Bob Brown's eyes were shining. "Boy! That'll really be something! To ride in space ships with the Septonians and drop down on a planet some dark night and —"

Curly was on his feet. "— and zowie! Three or four hours of fast work and we got 'em!" He looked up at the Septonian Counselor. "When do we get guns to practice with, Barchard?"

The latter laughed. "That will come in time. There's a lot to learn first. But when the time comes and you march along in the Earth Brigade wearing your gray uniforms — then you'll really thank us for what we've done for you."

"There must be an awful lot of planets to be conquered," Curly said seriously.

Johnny Carrol had gone scouting close by; now he came back with a long, slim stick. He sat down again near the lunch box. "Say — I didn't tell you. My father got called in to Divisional Control today, Barchard? You think they'll send him home again?"

Curly's eyes widened. "When he goes to Divisional Control? You're silly! Who ever comes back from there?"

"What's he been doing?" Bob

"Has anyone reported a missing link?"

asked. The boy selected another piece of cake and crammed a huge piece of it into his mouth.

"Oh, I don't know. Something about a book he wrote once. A book about kids."

"He's cooked," Curly said. "Boy, that chicken's good."

Johnny was squinting along the length of the stick he was holding. Now he looked up at Barchard. "This is what I learned to do that I wanted to show you. The Indians used to do it a long time ago. Can I borrow your knife?"

The pride in the boy's face was clearly apparent as he notched the stick at both ends and took a long leather thong from his pocket.

Barchard smiled and reached out his hand. "I know. It's quite a sport on Septos. Here. Let me help you."

The Septonians did everything with such ease and skill. Barchard fastened the thong to the bow using knots the boys had never seen before.

"That's a funny thing," Curly said. "What did the Indians do with it?"

"Gosh," Johnny said. "I'm not sure. I saw it in a book — one of my dad's books — and I was pretty sure I could make it."

"There's more to it," Barchard said. "You have to have a shaft. Swiftly he whittled out an arrow, found a three-cornered bit of stone and fastened it in place. Then, setting the arrow into the bowstring, he lined it quickly and sent it whistling straight into a sapling some fifty yards away.

Johnny got up and ran to retrieve the arrow. He returned. "Gosh! Will you show me how?"

Barchard adjusted the arrow carefully into the leather thong. "You hold it like that and pick your target. Better aim at a close one to start with."

Johnny stepped away — one step — two — three. Then he turned and drove the arrow straight into Barchard's heart.

The Septonian died instantly, doing even that more quietly and gracefully than any Earthman. He sank to the ground and lay still.

Johnny stared down at the dead body, the bow frozen in his hands. The other two boys crouched motionless.

Curly broke the spell. He turned on Johnny savagely. "All right. How you going to cover it up? Come on! Show us! You better have some good ideas."

Bob was on his hands and knees, looking up like some alert, intense animal. "Don't worry about Johnny. He got top marks in school. He don't dive into things blind."

"It was him that got my dad," Johnny said dully. "When I told him Dad used to write, he dug out all his old books. It was Barchard."

"The hell with that," Curly snapped. "What you got figured out?"

Johnny came back with a start. "Figured out? Oh. That's easy."

"Show us."

Johnny dropped the bow and began trembling. Tears welled up in his eyes and he was crying. He held out his hands in a pleading gesture. "Barchard was showing us about Septos and he made this thing that shoots sticks. I asked him if I could shoot it and he said sure and I asked where? And he went out a little ways and pointed to a tree and I said okay but you'd better get back because I never did this before. But he laughed and wouldn't do it. He said he had faith in my aim. He said he knew I could hit the tree all right, but I didn't. I — I hit Barchard."

There was almost a minute of silence except for Johnny's continued weeping. Then Curly said, "It's pretty good. I think you'll get away with it."

Bob went over and pulled the arrow out of Barchard's body. "Come on," he said. "We've got to get going. It's going to be a job lugging this guy back to the car."

The inquiry was long and arduous, but now it was over — a verdict of accidental death rendered — and three tired boys were walking home. They were low in spirits and little was said. They stopped in front of Bob's house.

"Well," Curly muttered. "We got away with it. You ought to be happy, Johnny."

Johnny's face was pinched and miserable. "I wish I could have said goodbye to him — at least shaken his hand. Even . . . even kissed him."

Curly was amazed. "Who — *Barchard?*"

"No. My dad. And I wish I could do something for Mom."

Curly took Johnny's wrist and squeezed it tight. "Now cut it out, Johnny!"

"Sure," Bob said. "Cut it out! They licked us, didn't they? In twenty-four hours they had us on our backs. So their way is best — the right way."

"And we're learning. They're teaching us. Every day we learn more. So don't be a fool!"

Johnny grinned. "I'm okay, fellows. Don't worry about me. We'll keep on cramming it in, and someday they'll give us guns."

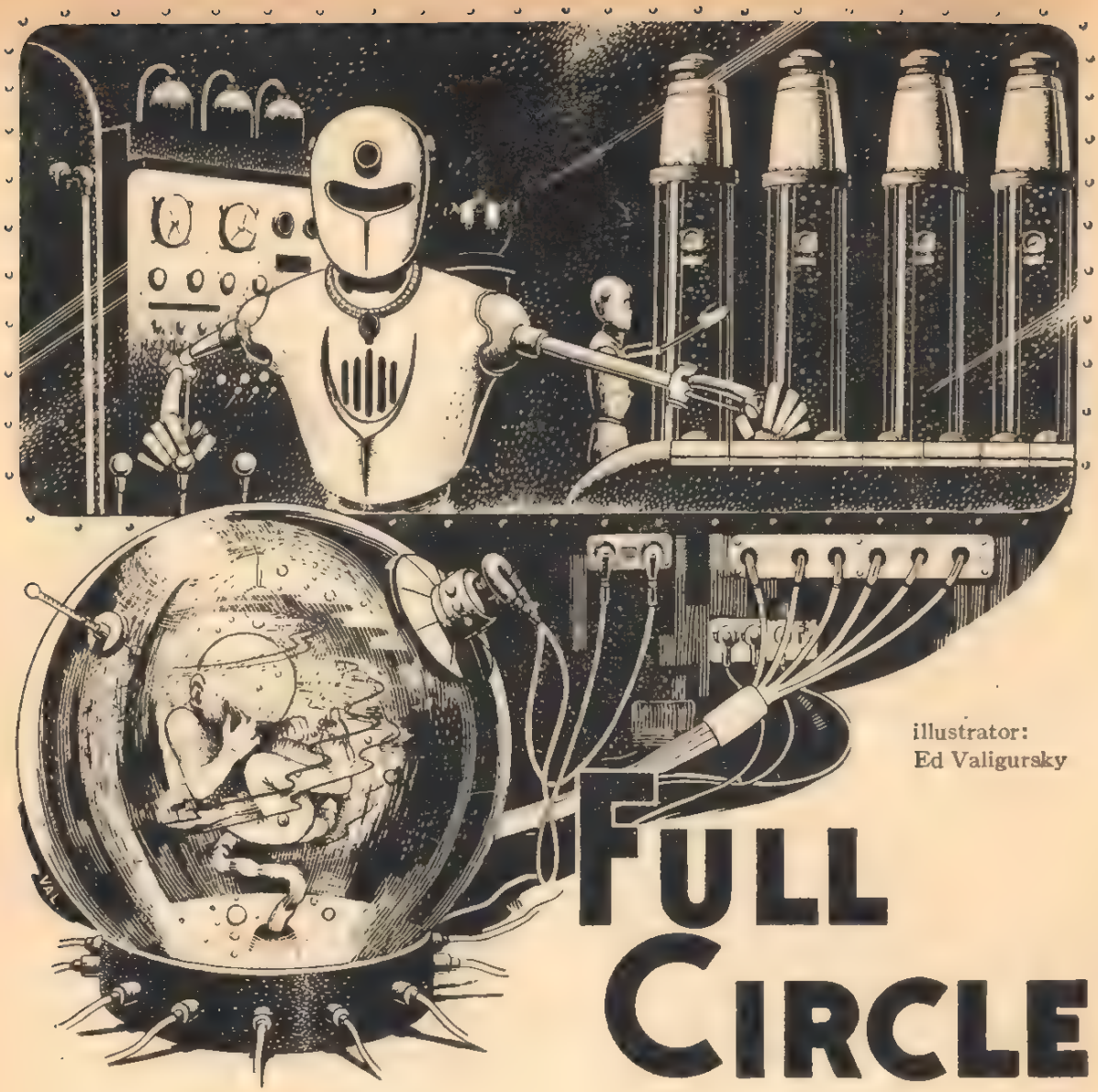
"That's right," the other two agreed. "Someday they'll give us guns."

"See you tomorrow," Bob said.

"Right. See you."

Bob Brown went into his house. Johnny and Curly walked on up the street.

SCIENCE is a cemetery of dead ideas.
— Miguel de Unamuno



illustrator:
Ed Valigursky

FULL CIRCLE

By H. B. Hickey

The ultimate consequence of man's fascination with better and more complicated machines is postulated in this sardonic short-short by one of the more talented and ingenious writers of science-fiction.

Like so many authors, Mr. Hickey turned to writing after a good many false starts in other directions. He sold haberdashery and music lessons, sewing machines and cigars, photographs and radio scripts, before he finally got around to selling editors. He now lives in California with his wife and two sons, where he turns out western-, detective-, and science-fiction with equal facility — and all excellent.

"ATTENTION!"

From a thousand speakers, strategically placed, the voice came like a crash of thunder.

"Attention! Stop work!"

With a sound like earthquakes rumbling and mountains falling and the sweep of tidal waves, the machines ground to a halt. The vats ceased their bubbling and the tubes went dark.

In all the immensity of the factory, mile upon mile of sunlit vastness, there was no sound. A hundred feet high and a thousand feet long, machines reared up, waiting. In the vats, a million gallons to each, the liquids lay in flawless crimson sheets.

"An important announcement!" the voice thundered. "Final tests on the '63 model have been completed!"

Still silence, but now a waiting, wondering silence.

"Success!" the voice said. "Our fondest hopes have been exceeded!"

Pandemonium. Metal ringing on metal, multiplied a thousand, a million, a million million times, ringing and clashing and echoing until at last the echoes faded away.

"Yes," the voice said, and somewhat hushed now. "Success. In the year 20,362 we have achieved it.

"Without fear of exaggeration we may say that not since the dawn of time, not since that legendary and unrecorded day when we ourselves were created, has there been anything like the '63 model.

"You will soon have the complete story, but for the moment these few facts will suffice: the '63 model will require no servicing! It will run efficiently on almost any fuel available! It is self-repairing! It will adjust automatically to an unbelievable range of temperature changes!"

Again pandemonium. And finally the voice again, rising above all other sounds.

"It is hardly necessary to add that production is high enough so that the '63 model will be available to all.

"And now — everything is ready, blueprints and materials are being fed to the machines. Back to work!"

In the factory the crimson liquids bubbled in the vats and surged through the pipes and were pierced by lightning bolts from the great vacuum tubes. Through the machines and the presses the solids flowed and were rolled and beaten and powdered. And there were all the gases necessary.

Oxygen and hydrogen and chlorine and cobalt and copper and iron and calcium and phosphorus and sodium and potassium; they combined and united and divided and were shattered and remade by million of volts of artificial lightning.

(*Continued on page 161*)

THE RUNAWAY

By

Louise Lee Outlaw

What's inside us? Good red blood, a pile of bones, the necessary plumbing and a soupçon of brains? Is that all? (All right: the soul — but we're talking about tangibles.)

Louise Lee Outlaw, whose stories have appeared in such magazines as Cosmopolitan and Today's Woman, says there can be more, and goes on to prove as much with the taut drama of a young woman who could see, when the light was right, the head and shoulders of a strange man growing out of her husband's back. Obviously she couldn't tell her husband to go out and play with trains to cure himself — but that's exactly what she did!

"WHY won't you believe me?" The pretty, prematurely grey woman leaned close to the police sergeant's desk. Her thin hands twined and untwined in a tireless ballet. "I murdered a boy — ten years old — and I murdered my husband! Both of them. Please believe me!"

The police sergeant shook his head. "Now, May, you just be a good girl and go on home. You know you didn't kill nobody."

The woman stared at him with large, tormented eyes. Slowly, like a chastened child, she turned and

illustrator:
Robert Kay

walked out of the police station.

The sergeant glanced at the tall, redheaded foot patrolman who was lounging near the telephone. "Think she'll ever give up?" he said. He shook his head, flicked cigar ash to the floor. "Every day she's in here — every day since last August. Always with the same crazy story: she murdered a boy and her husband. Makes you wonder — how does a woman get that way?"

The psychiatrist's voice went rolling on, velvety, imperturbable — suggesting, hinting, seeking — and May Barton, sitting at the other side of the bare oak desk, heard her answers falling like stones from her lips.

"Does your husband resemble your father?" the psychiatrist said. "When you look at your husband in a certain light, do you sometimes feel you're looking at your father?"

"No!" May Barton's voice seemed to explode from her throat. "No! That isn't it at all!" She stared at the psychiatrist's face, at the pink and white serenity of it. "It's nothing like that. It's something crazy. I *told* you —"

"Mrs. Barton, with your cooperation and with patience *and* with time, I'm sure we'll find a sensible explanation for your experiences," the psychiatrist said. "Patients often come in here believing they have tangled with some supernatural manifestation. Then, after a time, we discover there wasn't anything so supernatural about it after all. If you'll just think over my questions. Take your time. . . ." The white, calm hand touched the desk calendar. "Suppose you visit me next Wednesday — say about ten o'clock? Would that fit in with your schedule?"

May Barton's shoulders slumped against the leather chair. "Yes . . . Yes — that's fine — Wednesday. . . ." She stood up, a slender, dark-haired, pretty woman in her middle twenties, the agitation of her face in marked contrast to the tidy compactness of her figure, the restrained cut of her sharkskin suit. She started toward the door. Suddenly she swept around, stared back at him. "Dr. Seymour — you don't think —? I'm not mentally unbalanced, am I?" She waited, almost willing him to say: *Yes, I'm afraid so, I'm afraid you are.* It would be an end to the riddle, at least, an explanation. . . .

But there was only the placid smile, the toneless voice: "Mrs. Barton, if you are mentally unbalanced, I'm a very, very incompetent psychiatrist."

She groped back to the door — walked into the outer office, and then down the brownstone steps to the street. On the corner she turned, glanced back at the psychiatrist's dull brass nameplate. I won't go back, she thought.

He doesn't understand — doesn't want to understand. He wants it to fit a pattern, some recognizable Freudian pattern.

Sickness churned in her. What would she do now? Where would she go — what would she do?

It must be three o'clock, she thought. She closed her eyes against the sun's glare. Ten blocks away the apartment waited, cool, familiar. She thought of taking ice cubes from the refrigerator, their clinking in a glass — the electric fan — the chair by the window. For a moment the vision smiled at her, beguiling. And then, in a wave of panic, she knew its falseness — knew even the smallest comforts were no longer to be found in the apartment. If she went home it would be to sit rigid, waiting for five-thirty, waiting for Jim's bounding step on the stairs —

No! The word shrieked in her mind. She stared at the sidewalk — small flickering white lights seemed to sweep across her eyeballs — small white dancing lights. The heat, she told herself, and then all at once another thought came, leaped, pranced, fluttered ribbons of hope.

Her eyes! Why hadn't she thought of it before? All of it — the whole crazy business — it could be just her eyes! Eye strain — simple eye strain! She read a lot — and now she needed glasses. That was all there was to it!

She almost smiled. Paying twenty dollars to that pink and white Buddha. Going through that humiliating mumbo-jumbo. She didn't need a psychiatrist; she needed an eye doctor. An eye doctor. There was one right here on Spruce Street. She'd gone to him that time she'd gotten a cinder in her eye.

She began to walk quickly, lightly — immune now to the somber, relentless August heat. She saw herself smiling at the eye doctor, taking a prescription. Yes, Doctor, I *thought* maybe it was my eyes. After all, seeing double . . .

"Seeing double, eh?" Dr. Witkin was young; he had a new sunburn; in the after-glow of a vacation he was unremittingly happy and hummed as he led her to another chair. He took up a white rod about ten inches long; at the end of the rod there was an oval of red glass. "We call this the red glass test," he said enthusiastically. "If you're seeing double, we'll be able to tell in a minute." He projected a slender flashlight behind the oval of the red glass, held them both close to her right eye. "Now, tell me: what do you see?"

"I see a horizontal red line," May Barton said eagerly.

"Nothing else? No white line?"

"No — just a red line."

Dr. Witkin's eyebrows rose. "Sure?"

"Yes — just a red line."

He put the red glass and the flashlight back on his tray. "Mrs. Barton, you're not seeing double. You're seeing just what people with normal sight see. Now, if you'd said you saw a red line *and* a white line, I'd think you had a paralysis of the eye muscles. But apparently you don't. Feel better now?"

She stared at him, her throat dry. "But — but I *do* see double. I told you —"

"Just *what* do you see double, Mrs. Barton? Do you see me double? Right now? Do you see anything in this room double?"

"No — no. . . ." She glanced away from him — swept her eyes around the antiseptic walls — stared at the reading chart, the brown metal cabinets, hoping, willing the horrible thing to be simple, soluble in this instant. But the room gave off no twin images — no shadows. "At home," she mumbled sickly. "It happens at home. . . ."

"What do you see double at home?"

"My — my husband. I mean — his shoulders — sometimes his head or his hands —" Her voice grew loud, the syllables tremulous. "When he sits in his chair . . . It's seeing double, it *must* be! It's as if he — as if he were two people — as if something were going to come *out* of him — walk around the room!"

Frowning, Dr. Witkin stepped a little away from her. He looked injured, jolted from his holiday memories. Then his forehead cleared abruptly. "You know what I think? I think you need a vacation, a nice little trip to the beach. Maybe you've been working too hard — maybe the kids are wearing you down —"

"I don't have any children."

"Well, if you wish I can give you eyedrops — just to double-check. But there's nothing wrong with your eyes — nothing wrong with the retina, nothing wrong with the vision. Your chart reading's 20–20."

"All right — all right." She fumbled in her bag, thrust a ten-dollar bill at him. He's young, she thought desperately. Maybe he's wrong — maybe another doctor —

"Say," — Dr. Witkin's voice was high, jovial — "Maybe you went to a little cocktail party. Maybe you were having a good time. Now, that's when you *can* see double."

She tried to smile, tried not to disappoint him. Over her shoulder she saw the chart — even from the door the smallest letters were quite clear and firm-bodied — and in that instant she knew he was right: there was nothing wrong with her eyes. Except when she saw Jim. It was only Jim she saw double. Only Jim . . .

She walked rigidly back to the bus stop, boarded the bus, huddled close to the window. She

tried not to think of the night ahead of her, the horrible thing that was bound to happen. A vacation, she thought feebly, and tried to think of a sunny beach, bright umbrellas, wide horizons. But she knew she needed no vacation. There had never been enough to fill her day — nothing to tire her. The three-room apartment was easy to keep clean; in it she had long hours of leisure, and they had never weighed on her. It had been a happy, lazy life — shopping, cooking for Jim, listening to the radio. Nothing to tire her — nothing to strain the mind, set off sparks of fantasy.

It *must* be a fantasy, she told herself fiercely. Just a fantasy and she had let it grow, let it possess her. She'd never mentioned it to Jim, and maybe that was the trouble.

I ought to tell him, she thought. He'd laugh, laugh the crazy thing away.

The thought of Jim's laugh, that wonderful, untrammeled boy's laugh, loosened her. Her hands relaxed in the circle of sunlight on her lap. Tell Jim. . . . Tell Jim. . . . She should have done it long ago — a month ago — the first time she'd noticed it.

The bicycle was still in the foyer when she turned the key in the downstairs door. She smiled, remembering last night — Jim's sudden whim to ride the bike down Henley Street. "The neighbors will think we're crazy, two grown people on a bike," she'd protested, but she'd gone with him, squeezed uncomfortably on the steel bar behind the seat.

Glancing over her shoulder, seeing Jim there, she had felt almost shaken with her love for him. He had looked like a small boy — his light brown hair rumpled by the breeze. And his cheek resting against hers had been smooth, so smooth. . . . It was hard to believe this bike-rider was the same man who left her in the mornings, business-like in his tropical worsted, his cocoanut-straw hat. It was hard to believe he was Jim Barton, a rewrite man for the *Inquirer*. It was hard to connect the bike-riding Jim with the Jim who pounded out those fast-moving, page-one stories. When he was working on a story, his eyes were skeptical, adult.

She opened the door of the apartment. Immediately she felt it, the aura of dread. She remembered what had happened last night after the bike ride, remembered Jim sitting in the chair by the window. Jim, completely unaware of her staring eyes — completely unaware of the thing she saw emanating from him — the strange, shadowy double that drifted from him like a ghost.

Don't think about it, she told herself. Tonight it's going to be settled, you're going to tell Jim. She was slicing the roast beef

when she heard him running up the stairs. Running. He never walks when he can run, even in this heat, she thought.

"Hi, sweet." He was in the room, grabbing her around the waist — a tall, awkward, rangy man. They called him "Legs" at the office.

"Hi," May said. She looked at him, deliberately searching for the thing, the fantasy, the crazy puzzle.

Nothing happened. Had she exorcised it? Was it gone for good? In a flurry of excitement, she piled food on Jim's plate, sat and watched him eat, watched his every movement. She saw nothing — nothing but Jim. No shadows, no fantasies.

I'm cured, she thought, and wanted to laugh. Maybe she wouldn't have to tell him — confess her silliness — after all.

They had cleared away the dishes and she was about to turn on the radio when Jim snapped his fingers, hurried to the chair where he'd draped his jacket. "I forgot to show you what I found today," he said. "A new stamp — a beaut — new Portuguese issue."

"All the great men in the world collect stamps, did you know that, Mr. Barton?" she said, laughing, glancing at him over her shoulder.

Then it happened.

It was as if something were detaching itself from Jim. It was almost like the shadow of another person. She could see it: the double shoulders, the double arms, wavering, seeming to struggle —

She screamed. The scream arched over her — pounded at the walls. She saw Jim turn, still holding the stamp. Saw his eyes widen.

"What is it? What is it, darling?" he said, hurrying close, putting his arm around her.

She buried her head wildly in his shoulder. She felt the shudder of her body, but she couldn't stop it. "Jim . . . Jim . . . there's something wrong with me. Something wrong . . ."

"What is it? What's the matter?"

"Oh, it's silly. I know it's silly." The fear was leaving her but her voice was still ragged. She could still feel the heavy thumping of her heart. "I went to a doctor today, Jim. A psychiatrist. I thought I was seeing double. I thought it just now when I saw you —" She stared up at him, waiting for his laugh.

"Double?" His eyes flickered away from her. "What do you mean?"

Why didn't he laugh? Why were his eyes escaping her?

"You. I keep seeing you double, Jim. Just you, nothing else. Isn't that crazy? Did you ever hear of anything so crazy?"

"May — May, what do you see?" The words were slow, carefully spaced. She'd never heard

him speak in that manner. His voice was usually quick, a little breathless, as if every particle of life excited him.

"Well, I see a sort of shadow coming from you," she struggled. "As if you have two sets of shoulders. As if —" She shook her head hard. "Oh Jim, what's the matter with me? It's making me sick. I can't think of anything else. Lately I haven't even wanted you to come *home!*" The last word broke apart. She felt the hot tears crowding her eyeballs.

"I — I — you're just imagining things, honey. I —"

She met his eyes.

He looked away. With a convulsive movement, his hands went to his face. "No, I'm lying to you, May. Never did that. . . ." His voice was muffled. "You're the only person who's ever seen it. But I knew it was there. I can feel it; feel it moving around in me. It's as real as — as flesh."

She stared up at him, felt her lips move. But no words came.

"I didn't think anyone could *see* it," he went on hoarsely. "It's been going on for years, but the psychiatrists wouldn't believe me."

"You went to psychiatrists?"

He nodded. "Three of them. They all refused to believe. . . ." He stared at the floor. "Not all the time. I don't feel it all the time. Karl was the only one who believed it. I told him."

"Karl?"

"Karl Weil. He's a . . . a mentalist," Jim said, as if he didn't like the sound of the word. "A crazy, eccentric mentalist. I — I interviewed him once. A feature — you know, kind of sarcastic, something to make the readers laugh. I told him about this — this — I was worrying about it, just before we were married."

"And he believed you?"

"Yeah — sure. That's his business." He looked at her, wanting to seem mocking. "He had a theory — something crazy. I didn't pay much attention —"

"Maybe we — maybe we ought to go to see him. I mean . . . if the psychiatrists won't believe . . ." She didn't know why she was making the suggestion. A mentalist. Sensible people didn't believe in mentalists. She thought of a dark room, a man staring into a crystal ball. . . .

Jim covered his face with his hands. "I wouldn't care for myself. But for you —"

"Oh darling, I don't mind. It doesn't bother me!" She moved toward him. But in that moment, as his arms reached for her, she saw the double line of his shoulders, the double line of his arms. Saw the thing that seemed to want to leap from him. Without thinking she backed away, drew her hands protectively across her breast — and then, meeting Jim's eyes, she knew he had seen her horror.

Karl Weil was a thin brown man in white shorts and a white sweat shirt.

"Oh, my friend from the Inquirer," he said. "More publicity? Or is this a *personal* call?" He smiled, waved toward the room. "Come in, come in and sit down." He preceded them, walking with pointed toes like a ballerina. His legs were hairy but thin, unbelievably delicate. May, holding onto Jim's arm, wanted to run back to the door. The man's pleasure at seeing them, his thick, gloating pleasure, sickened her.

There were two chairs in the room, dark brown, sagging. There was a desk piled with paper-backed books. Tracts, May thought, and closed her fingers over Jim's. Let's go — let's get out of here, she wanted to say. But she stifled the words. If there was a chance, if this strange creature could help them . . .

Karl Weil sat on the floor. There was a bowl of vegetables beside him. "I'm a vegetarian," he said. "Do you mind?" He picked up a carrot, munched it, then looked at Jim. "How is your double, Mr. Barton?"

May shivered. She was afraid of Karl Weil, afraid of the room, afraid even to touch the arm of the desiccated brown chair.

"Your wife is worried?" Karl said. "She has seen it?"

Jim nodded.

The mentalist smiled knowingly. "It sometimes happens. When there is great love, great closeness, there is acute psychic perception." He put the carrot down, put away his smile. He was suddenly ferret-faced, sharp-eyed. "We talked about this at length the last time. We said we could find the answer in your boyhood. Have you thought about it?"

"Yes, yes, I've thought about it," Jim said thickly.

"And was there, as I suggested, a thing you wanted to do and never did?" Karl said, still with the lifted chin, the narrowed eyes.

"There was something," Jim said. "I — I wanted to run away once, when I was a kid. You know, run away from home. I didn't have to try hard to remember. It — it was a big disappointment. I guess I never really got over it."

"Yes." Karl's voice was a hiss. "You never ran away from home — is that it? Something stopped you?"

"My old man — my father." Jim forced a laugh. "I tried three times — you know, wanted to hop a freight train. He always caught me, brought me back. What a walloping he'd give me!"

Karl's shoulders moved impatiently. "And this has bothered you for how long?"

"Bothered me?" Jim said. "Well, yeah, I guess it *has* bothered me. I know, I sometimes still feel like —" Sheepishly, he cut the words off. "Oh, that was all

twenty years ago. I was only ten years old."

Karl picked up another carrot. "It's not so difficult after all. We contain many selves; they are all imprisoned in here." He slapped his chest. "Most of them have lived their lives and they are now only memories." He smiled in May's direction. "But Mr. Barton's boyhood self — it did not live completely — did not finish its cycle. It is in him, wanting to get out, wanting to complete its life.

"He wanted to run away. Perhaps he was meant to run away. Perhaps we could say running away was the finale, the curtain scene of his boyhood. But he didn't run away; the curtain never went down. In a sense, you might say Mr. Barton contains an uncompleted boyhood inside of him. I am very sensitive to these things."

May stared at the brown, smiling face, the hairy, delicate body. She looked away, looked at Jim. Uncompleted boy. She felt dizzy, felt the room revolve. . . .

"May — May — are you all right?" Jim's arm closed around her shoulders, his cheek touched hers — his smooth, boyish cheek.

They ordered sandwiches in a nearby restaurant, but neither of them ate anything. Jim's face was pale. He kept repeating his protest: "The whole thing's crazy. I don't believe it — not for a moment."

"Jim, did you mean it — what you told Weil about still wanting to run away? Do you really feel that sometimes — that you want to —"

"That part's true enough. But heck, it's just a boyhood frustration. Everyone has one —"

"Jim!" She was suddenly excited. "That's just it! Remember that day I bought the doll — the doll with red hair — and you laughed at me. Remember?"

"Sure — sure. But nobody sees *you* double!"

"But — but I *bought* the doll! I'd always wanted a red-headed doll and so I bought one. When I was twenty-four years old! Maybe I was sort of . . . sort of belatedly finishing my girlhood! Maybe what Karl said is true: maybe you've never done the one thing that would finish your boyhood!"

"Funny thing," Jim said. "How clearly I remember that day — the last time I tried to run away. It was just about this time of year. I remember because my birthday was coming up. I went down to the railroad station and I almost made the twelve-o-five. She was puffing along the tracks and I was just about to climb aboard when my old man showed up. Chased me out and dragged me home. I didn't get any birthday present that year." He smiled reminis-

cently. "Gosh, that was twenty years ago."

May straightened. "And for twenty years you've been wanting to hop that train. Darling, there's only one thing for you to do: try it."

"What?" Jim stared at her. "You mean . . . run away? *Now?*"

"Well . . . well, you could *try*. I mean, just for a day. Maybe it would ring down that curtain Weil was talking about."

"But I'm a grown man . . ." Jim's voice trailed off. There was a leaping light in his eyes — a light like excitement, like eagerness.

Something coiled around May's heart. She knew suddenly that she resented this boyishness in him, had always resented it. The way he would drop everything, even a luncheon date with her, to go watch a sandlot baseball game. The almost obsessed care he gave that bike. Perhaps if he went away, rid himself of his ghost, he would come back whole, a real adult. Perhaps she would feel a new richness in their love.

"I mean it, darling," she said. "I think you should go."

But in the morning, as they lay close together, he said: "We were crazy to talk about it. Let's just forget the whole thing."

For a moment, she was tempted to agree. But as she saw him move from the bed, saw the shadow forming around his shoulders, saw how clear it was — almost palpable — she sat up and said: "We're not going to forget it, Jim. You're going. I insist." Her voice shook over the words. She saw the familiar small-boy tousle of his hair and she reached into her imagination, trying to picture him as a disappointed little boy, his father dragging him home, thwarting his sense of adventure.

Why not? Why mightn't the mentalist be right? The mind was a strange, uncharted place, full of dark necessities, undivined hungers.

Jim wasn't arguing any more. He was putting his pearl-handled penknife in his pocket, taking out his rough plaid shirt. They'd planned it all the night before. They would act as if it were an ordinary day, as if he were going to the office. The pretense would make him feel as if he were really running away.

She made him a big breakfast. He would need it, hopping a freight, ending up in some town he'd never seen.

Crazy. Her husband — an uncompleted boy. Crazy . . . She forced herself to smile at him, forced herself to eat. She wouldn't cry, wouldn't weaken him. Something was sick in him, and they were trying a cure. That was all there was to it.

At the door he hesitated. "Oh, sweet, I don't think —"

"It's eleven-thirty. You'd better get started," she said firmly. He kissed her, held her close — and then he was bounding down the stairs.

She was frightened the moment she heard the front door close. Her hands shook as she plunged them in the dishwater. He'd be back tomorrow. "Just a hop into the next town," he'd said. Just one day. There was nothing to worry about.

Determinedly, she finished the dishes, took the vacuum cleaner from the closet. But the fear kept hanging over her, unreasoning, enveloping. She tried to defeat it with the vacuum's deafening drone. She went from room to room, but the fear followed, clung. . . . Suddenly she realized why. She and Jim had never been separated before, not even for a day. And now he was hopping a train, going somewhere without her, and she had the insane feeling that when he got on that train he might never come back! Maybe he wasn't supposed to hop a train. Maybe uncompleted acts were supposed to stay that way! He might just disappear; she might never see him again!

Frantically she ran to the kitchen, looked at the clock. 12:10. Maybe he hadn't caught a train yet; maybe she could still find him! She yanked off her apron, snatched up her keys. Her heart was pounding furiously as she ran to the door. She took the steps two at a time.

The railroad tracks gleamed in the sun, stretched ahead of her. And no one walked along them, no familiar, long-legged figure. Only a bird's chirping broke the silence. He's left. It's too late, she thought weakly, and started to turn away.

And then, about fifty yards down the tracks, in a clump of sunflowers, she saw something sprawled, crumpled. She stood frozen for a moment, and then she was running — running and moaning. But even before she reached the body she knew what she was going to find.

"But the railroad must have some explanation!" May Barton said. "How could it happen, how could such a thing happen? Aren't there safeguards? He was such a careful man. How could your train run him down?"

The stationmaster shook his head wearily. "I'm telling you, lady, it didn't happen that way. We didn't kill your husband, we ain't got nothing to do with what happened to your husband."

"What do you mean?" May Barton's voice broke. "He was right there — right next to the tracks — crushed —"

"Look, lady, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but . . . sometimes people get killed and dumped

(Continued on page 160)

illustrator:
L. R. Summers

By Kris Neville

For an effective tale of pure horror, you need far more than writhing spectres in the cold moonlight and eerie screams from the local cemetery. Instead, take a couple of nice normal people, put them at the mercy of some evil force straight from the flaming halls of Hell, stick in an effective mood to carry the load — and you've got the ingredients for a top-grade chiller.

In The Opal Necklace, Kris Neville has done exactly that, and the result is a weird wedding of the practical and the outre, in prose that comes close to being sheer poetry — but poetry with muscle!

"Yes, Mother."

"Come here, my child."

"Yes, Mother."

"Here. Out the window — the swamp. You see the swamp?"

"Yes, Mother."

The old witch flung open the casement. "Listen!"

Night was coming down. Long shadows fingered their way over the bayous. Water, heavy with vegetation, lapped faintly against the stunted mangroves. Bull frogs opened their bass symphony, echoing and re-echoing from farther

and farther away as others from the far side chimed in. Tiny tree frogs chirped; crickets grated their eerie notes. A loon, laughing mournfully, flapped across the tree tops.

"And you want to leave it? Answer me!"

"Yes, Mother."

The old witch cackled, and her thin, cracked voice drifted out over the swamp. "You can't leave it," she said. "You *can't* leave it. Its water is your blood, and its air is your lungs." She closed the window against the mosquitoes. The air was hot and humid and sour. "It's *you!* You can't leave it, do you hear? Do you hear?"

"Yes, Mother."

The witch sniffed. "You're swamp. If you leave it, you'll leave something of yourself here. You'll have nothing left to hold you together: the wind and the world will tear you to pieces. Love? Love can't hold *you* together, my child; not for long, my child. Only the swamp and the shadows and the darkness can." She flitted across the room to the old, rough-hewn table. She picked up a string of jewels. "Opals. People don't string opals," she cackled, pointing a bony finger at the girl. "They're bad luck. You know that?"

"Yes, Mother."

"You think you want power over him," the witch said. "Don't you?"

"Yes, Mother."

"But you don't *know* what you want, do you? Oh, you may *think* you know. Yes. But you don't. No — you don't. But you'll find it!"

The girl's teeth were chattering.

Chuckling, the old witch bent and lit a yellow tallow candle with a kitchen match. The flame spiraled straight up, giving off a faint, gray smoke and a sharp, greasy odor. She cocked her head, listening. "Hear them boys singing?" she rasped. "Hear them? That's you, too. Hear them?"

"Yes, Mother."

"Yes Mother, yes Mother, yes Mother," the witch mimicked. "Is that all you can say: yes Mother? Are you afraid of me? Is that it?"

"Yes, Mother."

The witch threw back her head and laughed shrilly; her talon-like fingers pawed the air with mirth. Then, as the laughter sobbed away, she began to chant, "Shelia Larson's afraid! Shelia Larson's afraid! Shelia Larson's afraid!"

She spun to face the girl; her face writhed in delight. Her eyes sparkled. Her wrinkled, grimy cheeks flushed with pleasure. "Did they teach you to be afraid of witches out there?" She waved her hands in a circle to indicate the world beyond the swamp. "No, no, no. No, they taught you to laugh at me out there, didn't they? But when you came back,

and when you wanted something, it was: yes Mother this, and yes Mother that, and you'll be glad enough when I do it. You're swamp, you hear!"

The witch was suddenly in front of her; one of her filthy hands circled Shelia's arm. "Stop shaking, stop shaking, stop shaking," she chuckled, peering up into the girl's face. "Did you bring the money, eh?"

"Yes, Mother."

The old witch let her hand fall away. "Put it on the table. Put it on the table."

Shelia crossed the room and placed the stack of silver coins next to the string of opals. The coins clinked together as she took her hand away. They gleamed dully in the candle light.

The old witch went to the table, and Shelia backed away. The witch picked up the opals, let them flow from one hand to the other. She crooned to them.

"Did you bring his hair, his nail parings?"

"Some dried blood, Mother."

The old witch cackled. "Good, good, good. Give it me!" She extended the bony hand, took the paper, peered at the brownish drops on it.

From the table the old witch selected a long, slender knife. Carefully she scraped the dried blood into a cracked pewter jar. She dipped into another jar, added something to the blood. Then her hands began to fly, adding, testing, mixing. Finally she stirred.

When the mixture was to her satisfaction, she sprinkled white powder over the opals. "All his joys," she chanted. "All her husband's joys. One, two, three, four. Into the opals, go into the opals. Five, six, seven, eight. . . ." One by one she polished them between her fingers. Then she dropped the string into the pewter jar. The opals made little bubbles in the syrupy, brownish liquid. Her cracked voice rose and fell in a Cajun chant. It whined and whispered and shrieked. She drew out the opals, dried each one carefully. The thin, tough silk cord on which they were strung was blood red. She handed the opals across the table.

"Go, go, go," she chanted softly.

"Hurry, hurry, hurry," the carnie called, his voice flat and monotonous. "Yes sir, step right this way! I'm giving away money at this booth! I'm kee-razy! Yes, over here's the crazy man! . . . What's that, sonny, whatcha say, sonny? You don't believe I'm crazy? Then step right up and I'll show you a picture of my wife. . . . Yes sir, yes sir. Over here's the crazy man, giving away money! Yes, he's giving it away!"

The ground was black, packed

hard by a thousand trampling feet, cluttered over with cigarette butts, gum wrappers, candy sticks, torn paper. There were swirling lights and happy holiday bunting and pink cotton candy. A calliope piped out its shrill notes to blend with the pleased child screams. A rifle cracked over and over in the shooting gallery.

Shelia Larson and her husband Gib, hand in hand, forced their way through the swirling crowd.

"Hootchy-kootchy girls, right this way. See the show that made Paireee. . . ."

"You want to try the roller-coaster again, honey?" Gib said.

Laughing, Shelia pushed the hair out of her face. "Not now," she gasped.

"Let's toss pennies then. Come on." Gib elbowed his way up to the booth. He turned to his wife. "Happy?"

"Yes," she said, her face shining, her eyes sparkling.

"Give me some change," he told the pitch man. The man counted out the pennies, and Gib gave half of them to Shelia. They laughed and tossed the coins at the colored squares. They won nothing, and when the pennies were gone they moved on, she clinging to his elbow possessively.

"Oh, look! They have a snake house!" Shelia cried, tugging at his coat. "Let's go!"

Gib smiled down at her. "Look at snakes after only five days of being married to me?"

"I want to," she pouted.

He shrugged. "Well . . ."

The weird whine of a snake charmer's pipe called from the snake house. It was from a record, and there was a monotonous tick-tick-tick in it.

Gib bought two red pasteboard tickets and they entered through the tent flap.

There was sawdust on the floor inside. In the center of the tent there was a shallow pit surrounded by a two-foot canvas over which spectators might peer down at the writhing reptiles. Only one man was watching, but he was watching in motionless fascination.

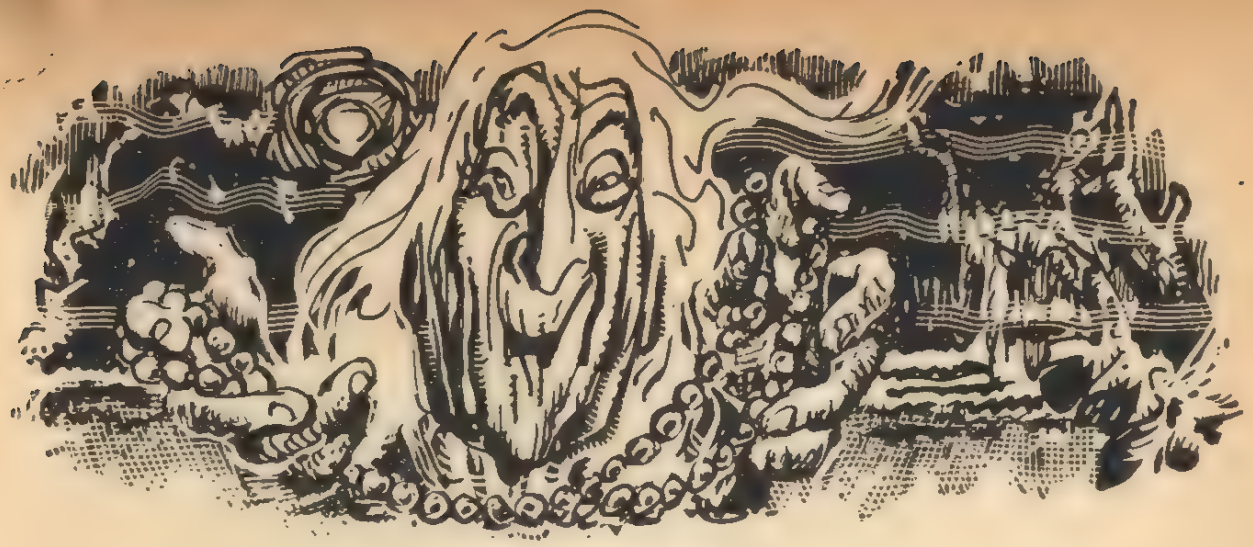
The man in the pit was handling a four-foot black snake. He paid no attention to the spectators. He let the snake coil around his arm and bring its head level with his face. The snake weaved back and forth, its tongue flickering furiously. It ducked its head and snapped it forward a few inches, almost as if it were trying to kiss the man on the lips. The pit man pushed its head away gently.

Shelia leaned forward, her eyes bright, her breath coming sharply.

"Let me see it!" she said to the pit man, holding out her hand.

The pit man turned to stare at her. "These are dangerous, lady."

She narrowed her eyes and glanced around the pit contemptuously. "Snakes like these?" she



asked, her voice low and throaty.

"Don't bother the man, Shelia," Gib suggested.

She turned her jet black eyes to her husband's face. "I want that snake."

Gib smiled indulgently. "I think we'd better go."

She ignored him and turned back to the pit man. Again she held out her hand. Their eyes locked. For a moment, they both stood motionless. Then he wavered.

"Okay, lady," he said, crossing the pit to her. "It's your funeral."

She reached out caressingly for the black snake, and it slithered onto her arm. She petted its scaly, sinuous body, and its tongue darted over her hand. She brought its head up, petting it softly just back of the jaws and laughing into its moving tongue.

"Let's go, Shelia," Gib said nervously. "Let's get out of here."

She pointed the snake at him playfully.

"Don't," he muttered.

"What's the matter? You afraid?" she chided gently.

"Of course not. Don't be silly. I just don't like the things. Give it back and let's go."

"All right," she said. "If you insist."

Once more on the midway, Gib said, "Why in the world did you want to handle that damned snake for?"

She looked up into his face. It was harsh and angular and cold in the vicious electric lights. Her heart was still pounding with the excitement of the swamp symbol, the snake. "You wouldn't understand," she said.

Uncomfortable silence fell between them; neither smiled. He guided her to a booth and bought two candied apples without asking if she wanted one.

Leaning against the booth, his candied apple in his left hand, he said, "Shelia, that snake —"

Her eyes darkened. "Look, Gib. Let's not argue."

He flushed under the tan. For a moment he seemed about to snap something, but instead he said, in

a quiet voice, "Of course not, Shelia."

The hot, southern night was clammy, and the air was stale with sweat and carnival smells.

She reached up and fingered the opals around her neck. If I should ever lose him, she thought, I should hate as a wild thing hates; as the dark savage I am, deep inside of me. Her fingers moved on the opals. It was the same petting gesture she had given the snake. I have these, she thought, if I should ever lose him. All his joys — everything he has — are in these opals. If they are destroyed, he has nothing.

"Honey," he said, "Why don't you let me buy you a string of pearls or something? Whoever heard of opals on a string, and a God-awful red string at that?"

Her hand dropped away from her throat.

"In New York —" he began.

"I'll wear them there, too," she said desperately. "Oh, Gib, Gib, Gib, let's not quarrel!"

"Gib, you shouldn't have brought me up here," Shelia said suddenly.

He pushed back his breakfast coffee, a hurt, puzzled look in his eyes.

Nervously, she stood up and crossed to the window. She stared out, over roof tops, along Park Avenue from the Eighty-fourth Street apartment. The buildings were bleak and dirty and squalid, and the large flakes of falling snow were soot-blackened as they fell.

"I hate this snow," she said. "I hate the sight of it and the smell of it. I hate this city." She turned from the window.

He was standing by the table now and his hands hung loosely at his sides. "I won't go down today if you don't want me to."

"No," she said. "Go on."

"Look. How's this? I'll get a couple of tickets to *South Pacific*, and —"

"No!" she snapped. "For God's sake, is that all you think about? Theater! Cocktail parties! And that damned Italian restaurant on Fifty-second street you're so fond of!"

The breakfast nook was neat and clean around them. The silver glistened beside alabaster plates. The thin glassware looked pathetically fragile without linen beneath it. The electric toaster popped and purred.

"What's the matter, honey?" he said after a moment.

"You better go," she said. "Please. Get out."

"Are you . . . sick?"

"No. Please leave, Gib. Quickly."

After he was gone she stood staring out the window into the vacant cold. The snow was deadening; it covered the warm streets like a giant vampire, sucking out all the aliveness. The sky choked down, trapping the world in slow

suffocation. It hungered after her body. She ached for the warm, moist world of the swamp.

She whirled savagely from the window. She picked up the orange juice glass and dashed it to the floor. It shivered brightly in all directions.

She went to the bedroom. It still had a warm, masculine odor. She opened the dresser and removed the choke string of opals. They were beautifully matched, tapering in pairs to the single, great, glowing one in the center. She held them in her hands, telling them slowly, as if she were holding a rosary. The opals were milky; they sparkled with rainbow dashes of fire. She held them up to the light, fascinated.

She heard the maid come in, and she dropped the opals guiltily, and they lay in the drawer, no longer a symbol of love, no longer warm with love; cold with snow, north wind, and strange, city faces. She stared hard at their icy glitter.

She crossed to the mirror and studied her face: her jet black hair, her creamy skin, her almost too large, sensuous mouth, her midnight eyes. Hard, vicious lines tightened in the corners of her mouth, and her hands curled tightly. . . .

When he came home from nine hours in the business world, Gib said, kissing her on the passively-offered cheek, "Shall we stay home tonight like old married folks?"

"I want to go out," she said.

"Oh?" he said, raising his eyebrows. "I thought you said this morning . . . Well, all right, dear. If you want to. Shall I phone Elmer and Mary, and we'll make it a foursome? How does the Waldorf sound?"

"No," she said, her eyes strange swamp pools. "I hate Mary!"

He took off his heavy top coat. He hung the coat carefully on the hall tree. "What's come over you, darling?"

"Nothing," she lied. "Nothing at all."

"The way you snap at me, it seems like whatever I say is going to be wrong."

Her lips curled too much at the corners.

"Look, Shelia. Now, see here!" But he couldn't think of anything to continue with, so he turned uncertainly to adjust his top coat; he brushed at the sleeves and plucked at the collar. After a moment he said, "Where would you like to go tonight?"

"Out," she said. "Somewhere wild. Harlem. Somewhere where people drink and fight and sing and love and hate. Somewhere *real!*"

He fumbled for a cigarette. "Look, Shelia. Why don't you take a month and run down to your home? I'll make the arrange-

ments for you at —"

"No," she said very slowly. "No, I think I want to stay near you." Her voice was husky. "I think I want to stay right here."

She picked up a man, without ever really looking at his face, in a little bar out somewhere near One-twenty-fifth Street. She took him back in a taxi, and he followed her up after loitering outside the apartment house for a few minutes, smoking restlessly. He pretended to be very skillful in such affairs, and he smelled of some astringent lotion and some cloying hair tonic and shoe polish. When it was over, she had difficulty getting him out of the apartment; and difficulty convincing him not to come back and not to phone.

He was gone, and she sat alone on the disarrayed bed, giggling. She drank again from the nearly empty fifth of gin that she had brought back with her. Benny, their cocker, lying before the bed, beat a ceaseless tattoo on the deep rug with his nervous tail. She laughed a bit hysterically at the sound, and with drink-heavy hands she tried to smooth the bed. The shadows, slipping in with coming night, were alive and pulsing and sad.

She drank again, and the bottle was empty, and she threw it to the silencing carpet where it lay on its flat, etched side, next to the dog.

Her hair was twisted and awry. The choker string of opals was tight on her neck: she had worn them since morning. Her wrinkled, pink slip spilled from the broken strap of her left shoulder.

The shadows muttered.

She heard him at the door. She heard the elevator click shut and fall away, sighing.

She ran from the bedroom, and Benny padded silently after her. She ran to her husband, barefoot, and simpering with eagerness.

Gig saw at a glance and, disgusted, brushed past her.

She followed him from the outer door down the short hallway, but at the doorway opening on the two steps down into the living room, she stopped. "Why'n'cha say somethin'?" she lisped.

Staring not at her, but at the trunk from Ceylon that rested on a squat stand against the far wall beside the flexible lamp, he said, "You're drunk, Shelia."

"Why'n'cha tell me I'm no good?" she demanded, screwing her face savagely in fury.

Still without looking at her, pity in his eyes now, he said, "You better go take a cold shower, Shelia."

"Why'n'cha tell me I'm no good?" she insisted. "Why'n'cha say you wish I was dead?"

Muscles jumped in his lean jaw. "Anyone can get drunk one time."

"There was a . . . man here. . . ." she said.

His face changed and, for the first time since his initial inspection, he turned to look at her. His eyes were suddenly understanding. "Is it about your parents?" he asked quietly. "Did something happen to your parents? What is it?"

She hiccoughed. "Nothin' happen' to my parents. There was a man here's all."

"You're drunk, Shelia."

"I slep' with him!" she cried in drunken glee. "There was a man here, an' I slep' with him!"

There was a shocked instant of silence, during which even the shadows were still.

"You brought me up here," she shrieked, "and you made me come up here, and now you've trapped me here, an' I'm caught in th' walls an' a li'le bit of me is in the skies an' I've got to get all of me back! You made me do it. You made me sleep with him, an' I won' forget. . . . Why'n'cha tell me I'm no good!"

His head bowed. He turned toward the bedroom. His lips were a thin line.

"Ain't'cha gonna call me a bitch!" she screamed. "Why'n'cha tell me I'm a nogood bitch?"

He left the room.

"I guess I showed you you couldn't treat me like — like — like . . . I guess I showed you!" she screamed after him.

He was packing. After a while she heard a suitcase lid slam and the lock catch. He came out of the bedroom and she stood waiting, and he brushed her aside angrily, calling, "Here, Benny! Here, Benny! Here, Benny!"

She weaved after him. "You think it's my fault, a'm'fault, don' ya?"

He knelt to take the dog.

"Don' ya, don' ya!"

"No," he said. "I blame myself, too." He held out his hand. "Here, Benny, come on, old boy."

"You should!" she crowed. "You should. It is your fault, all your ownswee'li'le fault, an' I'm gonna remember it!"

Gib put the squirming dog under his right arm and seized the suitcase viciously in his left hand. He stood up. "I'll send for the rest of my stuff."

"I'm gonna go home," she said drunkenly. "I'm all apart, an' I can't leave anything." She began to sob. "When I get myself back, I'm gonna go home."

He stared at her.

"Get *out!*" she cried hysterically.

After the door closed behind him and the dog, she stood dazed and unmoving. Finally, in a dream-like stupor, she reached up and freed her neck of the opals, breaking the string, spilling the gems loose into her hand. She selected a small one, placed the rest in a careful pile on the mantel-

piece. She looked at the small opal, and her eyes were feverish. Hypnotized by it, she walked leadenly to the kitchen. She put the opal on the floor. She took the electric iron, seldom used, from its dusty shelf. She pounded the opal with the base of the iron, and when it splintered into tiny fragments, she pounded them, and then she began to cry.

Downstairs, Benny squirmed out of Gib's arms and dashed in front of a hurrying Checkered Cab. There was a squeal of brakes, an excited snarl, a simultaneous thump and yip, and Benny lay dead and mangled in the slush.

"Hello," Elmer said nervously, avoiding Shelia's eyes. He hesitated a moment, his upper lip twitching angrily. "May I come in?"

She stepped back from the door.

She did not offer to take his coat, and he stood awkwardly beside her in the narrow hall. She did not look at him. She studied the Japanese print of a dove on a twisted branch that was hanging beside the hall mirror. The week-old flowers on the table were withered and dead.

"We better go in and sit down," he said.

Silently, she led the way.

When they were seated, he hunted beneath his top coat for his cigarette case, and without asking permission, he lit a cigarette. "I've just come from Gib," he said. "He was getting drunk again. He's never tried to drink much; I guess you know that. He gets drunk and keeps on drinking. See here, now, Shelia, he's had a very bad week."

Shelia crossed to the mantelpiece, rising from her chair as if in a dream. The opals were there in a box of white cotton, and four of them were missing. She fingered the box. "He phoned me to say Benny was dead," she said. "I told him not to phone me anymore. But I think he was trying to call today. I didn't answer the phone."

Elmer jerked the cigarette nervously. "He's actually physically sick, Shelia. He'll ruin his health. I think you should see him."

"No."

"He lost the wedding band you gave him. He's almost hysterical about it. He wants to know if he lost it while he was packing here?"

She fingered a spot where an opal had lain. "No," she said. "He didn't lose it here."

Elmer put the cigarette in the ash tray; his face was frozen in harsh lines. "He got a telegram this morning. His mother is very ill. He was too drunk when it came to make much sense out of it. And now he's getting drunk all over again. If you'd see him, maybe you could straighten him out enough to go up to see her."

She smiled faintly, rubbing the

spot where the opal she had shattered last night had lain. "I can't go back to him," she said. The remaining deadly opals were dark fire.

"Look here, damn it!" Elmer snapped, his face reddening with anger. "By God, after what he's done for you, I think you could show a little concern! He brought you up here and gave you a beautiful home and beautiful clothes and did everything he could in God's green earth to make you happy! I don't know what kind of a person you are, but I can't imagine anyone asking for better treatment than you got! I think at least for that, if not for anything else, you could see him! I think you owe him that much! You owe him at least that!"

She stared at the box in silence.

"My *God*, woman, what are you after!"

She whirled on him. "Myself!" she cried. "I'm after myself! He took *me!* Don't you see, I've got

"Yes?"

to get myself back! There's some of me in this hideous cold room, and there's some of me in his mother. There was some of me in Benny and the ring. I've got to get it all back so I can be whole again! He brought me up here and little by little I lost pieces of myself because he couldn't hold me together, and little by little I've got to get them back, and then I can go away. He brought me here to this hungry city, and I want to hurt him like he hurt me, but most of all I've got to be whole again!" She was sobbing. "I hate him! I hate him!"

"What are you trying to *do* to him!"

"Shut up! Shut up!"

"You crazy, sadistic *bitch!*"

"I hate him," she cried.

Then the door slammed, and Elmer was gone. Shelia went to a chair and sat unmoving, her lips parted, her breathing shallow. Seconds fell like the dust of Caesar. And then she stirred. Her hand, like a dying bird, fluttered weakly.

The day after Elmer called, she went out and slipped her address — in a note that she put beneath the saucer along with a twenty-dollar bill — to a soda jerk. He came as soon as he could, as she had known he would.

She made him sit down. He twisted nervously in the chair, staring around at the expensive apartment. He smiled nervously.

"It's all in these opals," she said. "They were put in the opals."

In the corner, although the soda jerk would not see her, the witch chuckled dryly, like dead, burning leaves.

"That's all my husband's joys, don't you see?" she said intently. "I have to punish him for what he did to me. But that's not all. No. I'm not *whole* any more, not until I get all of myself back! Until I get all our night whispers and love words and caresses and laughter and hot sweat and moans and tears and everything!"

The soda jerk squirmed, twisting his head on his skinny neck.

She leaned toward him, smelling of perfume. "I wish you were a garbage collector," she said thickly. "I wanna find a garbage collector, so me and him can go to the Stork Club."

The soda jerk massaged his bony Adam's apple, and Shelia frowned drunkenly. "That'll show him," she said. "I want to *hurt* him." She held out her arms. "Come here. I want you to . . . Come here!"

"Gosh, Miss . . . I . . . I don't understand you at all, not at all."

She bit her lip. She hesitated. Then she crossed nervously to the phonograph, put on a stack of records.

"Let's dance," she said, breath-

ing heavily. "You can understand me. I'm easy to understand."

The soda jerk refused to look into her eyes.

The witch fell silent in the corner when the music came, but the shadows beyond the lamp waited restlessly, and the opal fire on the mantelpiece pulsed uneasily.

The soda jerk was gone. He had fled, and she sat by herself on the sofa for some time. The telephone began ringing. She walked the apartment without answering it.

She took another drink, and the old witch said, "Shelia Larson's afraid!"

The opals pulsed hate. Her breathing was shallow. She picked up an opal, replaced it. It lay glittering. Repelling and attracting, and all the room focused waiting on the opal, and the witch said, "Shelia Larson's afraid!" And the opal fire twisted sinuously.

She went to the bath and turned on the shower, and flowing through routine movements undressed and got beneath it.

The water was spring rain upon white lilies, and her body trembled, and dripping down the drain the water said, "One, two, three, four . . ."

She stood, drying, before the mirror. She studied her sweaty face. Quickly she turned away and slipped into the robe. She knotted the belt with trembling fingers.

Back in the living room, the phonograph was still playing. She poured herself a drink when she came out of the bathroom.

"Go on," the old witch said.

Outside the window the night trembled, waiting.

The shadows came out to dance and chant, and Shelia went to the opals and took one down, and the old witch cackled and lit the tallow candle with a kitchen match, and the smoke had a greasy smell.

And the sour swamp air came in, and the distant call of a loon, and the hungry lap of water, and the slither of movement.

Outside the moon topped the buildings and shone down, a cold, barren, passionless, knowledgeless jewel of infinity.

Shelia drank again, and then she stumbled over a shadow.

The shadow led her, and she was in the kitchen with the electric iron in her hand, and reverently she lay the largest opal of all on the linoleum and raised the electric iron, and the witch rent the air with hysterical laughter, and the electric iron came savagely down.

And Gib wept at her funeral.

A SUPERSTITION is a theory which has been abandoned; a theory is a superstition which is still accepted as true.

— Forest Ray Moulton

The Smile

By

Ray Bradbury

Few readers are neutral where Ray Bradbury is concerned: he's been called everything from a "chromium-age Thoreau" to a "hyperbole-happy hater of humanity". Both quotes seem more precious than pertinent — but the fact remains that almost as much has been written about *Bradbury as* by *him. His work has appeared in smooth-paper magazines, in the pulps, on radio and television, as well as in numerous anthologies and pocket editions.*

We offer The Smile as typical Bradbury: a sensitive and significant theme against a background filled with the gritty desolation of a lost world too many of us may help to make.

L. Sterne Stevens

IN THE town square the queue had formed at five in the morning, while cocks were crowing far out in the rimed country and there were no fires. All about, among the ruined buildings, bits of mist had clung at first, but now with the new light of seven o'clock it was beginning to disperse. Down the road, in twos and threes, more people were gathering in for the day of marketing, the day of festival.

The small boy stood immediately behind two men who had been talking loudly in the clear air, and all of the sounds they made seemed twice as loud because of the cold. The small boy stomped his feet and blew on his red, chapped hands, and looked up at the soiled gunny-sack clothing of the men, and down the long line of men and women ahead.

"Here, boy, what're you doing out so early?" said the man behind him.

"Got my place in line, I have," said the boy.

"Whyn't you run off, give your place to someone who appreciates?"

"Leave the boy alone," said the man ahead, suddenly turning.

"I was joking." The man behind put his hand on the boy's head. The boy shook it away coldly. "I just thought it strange, a boy out of bed so early."

"This boy's an appreciator of arts, I'll have you know," said the

boy's defender, a man named Grigsby. "What's your name, lad?"

"Tom."

"Tom here is going to spit clean and true, right, Tom?"

"I sure am!"

Laughter passed down the line.

A man was selling cracked cups of hot coffee up ahead. Tom looked and saw the little hot fire and the brew bubbling in a rusty pan. It wasn't really coffee. It was made from some berry that grew on the meadowlands beyond town, and it sold a penny a cup to warm their stomachs; but not many were buying, not many had the wealth.

Tom stared ahead to the place where the line ended, beyond a bombed-out stone wall.

"They say she *smiles*," said the boy.

"Aye, she does," said Grigsby.

"They say she's made of oil and canvas, and she's four centuries old."

"Maybe more. Nobody knows what year this is, to be sure."

"It's 2251!"

"That's what *they* say. Liars. Could be 3000 or 5000 for all we know, things were in a fearful mess there for awhile. All we got now is bits and pieces."

They shuffled along the cold stones of the street.

"How much longer before we see her?" asked Tom, uneasily.

"Oh, a few minutes, boy. They got her set up with four brass poles and velvet rope, all fancy, to keep people back. Now mind, no rocks, Tom, they don't allow rocks thrown at her."

"Yes, sir."

They shuffled on in the early morning which grew late, and the sun rose into the heavens bringing heat with it which made the men shed their grimy coats and greasy hats.

"Why're we all here in line?" asked Tom at last. "Why're we all here to spit?"

Grigsby did not glance down at him, but judged the sun. "Well, Tom, there's lots of reasons." He reached absently for a pocket that was long gone, for a cigarette that wasn't there. Tom had seen the gesture a million times. "Tom, it has to do with hate. Hate for everything in the Past. I ask you, Tom, how did we get in such a state, cities all junk, roads like jigsaws from bombs, and half the cornfields glowing with radio-activity at night? Ain't that a lousy stew, I ask you?"

"Yes, sir, I guess so."

"It's this way, Tom. You hate whatever it was that got you all knocked down and ruined. That's human nature. Unthinking, maybe, but human nature anyway."

"There's hardly nobody or nothing we don't hate," said Tom.

"Right! The whole blooming kaboodle of them people in the

Past who run the world. So here we are on a Thursday morning with our guts plastered to our spines, cold, live in caves and such, don't smoke, don't drink, don't nothing except have our festivals, Tom, our festivals."

And Tom thought of the festivals in the past few years. The year they tore up all the books in the square and burned them and everyone was drunk and laughing. And the festival of science a month ago when they dragged in the last motor car and picked lots and each lucky man who won was allowed one smash of a sledge-hammer at the car.

"Do I remember *that*, Tom? Do I *remember?* Why, I got to smash the front window, the window, you hear? My god, it made a lovely sound! *Crash!*"

Tom could hear the glass falling in glittering heaps.

"And Bill Henderson, he got to bash the engine. Oh, he did a smart job of it, with great efficiency. Wham!"

But best of all, recalled Grigsby, there was the time they smashed a factory that was still trying to turn out airplanes.

"Lord, did we feel good blowing it up," said Grigsby. "And then we found that newspaper plant and the munitions depot and exploded them together. Do you understand, Tom?"

Tom puzzled over it. "I guess."

It was high noon. Now the odors of the ruined city stank on the hot air and things crawled among the tumbled buildings.

"Won't it ever come back, mister?"

"What, civilization? Nobody wants it. Not me!"

"I could stand a bit of it," said the man behind another man. "There were a few spots of beauty in it."

"Don't worry your heads," shouted Grigsby. "There's no room for that, either."

"Ah," said the man behind the man. "Someone'll come along some day with imagination and patch it up. Mark my words. Someone with a heart."

"No," said Grigsby.

"I say yes. Someone with a soul for pretty things. Might give us back a kind of *limited* sort of civilization, the kind we could live in in peace."

"First thing you know there's war!"

"But maybe next time it'd be different."

At last they stood in the main square. A man on horseback was riding from the distance into the town. He had a piece of paper in his hand. In the center of the square was the roped-off area. Tom, Grigsby, and the others were collecting their spittle and moving forward — moving forward prepared and ready, eyes

wide. Tom felt his heart beating very strongly and excitedly, and the earth was hot under his bare feet.

"Here we go, Tom, let fly!"

Four policemen stood at the corners of the roped area, four men with bits of yellow twine on their wrists to show their authority over other men. They were there to prevent rocks' being hurled.

"This way," said Grigsby at the last moment, "everyone feels he's had his chance at her, you see, Tom? Go on, now!"

Tom stood before the painting and looked at it for a long time.

"Tom, spit!"

His mouth was dry.

"Get on, Tom! Move!"

"But," said Tom, slowly, "she's BEAUTIFUL!"

"Here, I'll spit for you!" Grigsby spat and the missile flew in the sunlight. The woman in the portrait smiled serenely, secretly, at Tom, and he looked back at her, his heart beating, a kind of music in his ears.

"She's beautiful," he said.

"Now get on, before the police —"

"Attention!"

The line fell silent. One moment they were berating Tom for not moving forward, now they were turning to the man on horseback.

"What do they call it, sir?" asked Tom, quietly.

"The picture? Mona Lisa, Tom, I think. Yes, the Mona Lisa."

"I have an announcement," said the man on horseback. "The authorities have decreed that as of high noon today the portrait in the square is to be given over into the hands of the populace there, so they may participate in the destruction of —"

Tom hadn't even time to scream before the crowd bore him, shouting and pummeling about, stampeding toward the portrait. There was a sharp ripping sound. The police ran to escape. The crowd was in full cry, their hands like so many hungry birds pecking away at the portrait. Tom felt himself thrust almost through the broken thing. Reaching out in blind imitation of the others, he snatched a scrap of oily canvas, yanked, felt the canvas give, then fell, was kicked, sent rolling to the outer rim of the mob. Bloody, his clothing torn, he watched old women chew pieces of canvas, men break the frame, kick the ragged cloth, and rip it into confetti.

Only Tom stood apart, silent in the moving square. He looked down at his hand. It clutched the piece of canvas close to his chest, hidden.

"Hey there, Tom!" cried Grigsby.

Without a word, sobbing, Tom ran. He ran out and down the bomb-pitted road, into a field, across a shallow stream, not look-

ing back, his hand clenched tightly, tucked under his coat.

At sunset he reached the small village and passed on through. By nine o'clock he came to the ruined farm dwelling. Around back, in the half silo, in the part that still remained upright, tented over, he heard the sounds of sleeping, the family — his mother, father and brother. He slipped quickly, silently, through the small door and lay down, panting.

"Tom?" called his mother in the dark.

"Yes."

"Where've you been?" snapped his father. "I'll beat you in the morning."

Someone kicked him. His brother, who had been left behind to work their little patch of ground.

"Go to sleep," cried his mother, faintly.

Another kick.

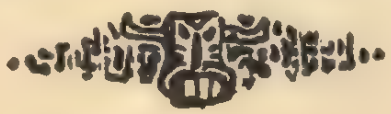
Tom lay getting his breath. All was quiet. His hand was pushed to his chest, tight, tight. He lay for half an hour this way, eyes closed. Then he felt something, and it was a cold white light. The moon rose very high and the little square of light moved in the silo and crept slowly over Tom's body. Then, and only then, did his hand relax. Slowly, carefully, listening to those who slept about him, Tom drew his hand forth. He hesitated, sucked in his breath, and then, waiting, opened his hand and uncrumpled the tiny fragment of painted canvas.

All the world was asleep in the moonlight.

And there on his hand was the Smile.

He looked at it in the white illumination from the midnight sky. And he thought, over and over to himself, quietly, *the Smile, the lovely Smile.*

An hour later he could still see it, even after he had folded it carefully and hidden it. He shut his eyes and the Smile was there in the darkness. And it was still there, warm and gentle, when he went to sleep and the world was silent and the moon sailed up and then down the cold sky toward morning.



Move Over, AA

NEW method for curing alcoholism has just been discovered. Two South African witch doctors have tried the remedy. They murdered a 12-year-old boy, fed his flesh to a tribal chief to cure the chief's predilection for that spiked liquid.

P.S. Cure didn't work.

illustrator: David Stone

And three to get ready . . .

By H. L. Gold

Ask a psychiatrist if any of his patients' strange stories could possibly be true and more than likely he'll give you the raised eyebrow. In that case, ask him to read Mr. Gold's spine-chilling yarn about the man who claimed he could kill simply by wishing the victim's death. It's a sure cure, we think, for skepticism, no matter how you interpret the ending.

. . . Not only is H. L. Gold responsible, as editor, for the rocket-like rise of the science-fiction magazine Galaxy, but he has written over five million words of slick, pulp and radio literature — by sheer bulk alone enough to grind facets of brilliance in whatever he does these days.

USUALLY, people get committed to the psycho ward by their families or courts, but this guy came alone and said he wanted to be put away because he was deadly dangerous. Miss Nelson, the dragon at the reception desk, put in a call for Dr. Schatz and he took me along just in case. I'm a psycho-ward orderly, which means I'm big and know gentle judo to put these poor characters into pretzel shapes that don't hurt them, but keep them from hurting themselves or somebody else.

He was sitting there, hunched together as if he was afraid that he'd make a move that might kill anyone nearby, and about as dangerous-looking as a wilted carnation. Not much bigger than one, either. Maybe five-four, 125

pounds, slender shoulders, slender hands, little feet, the kind of delicate face no guy would ever pick for himself, but a complexion you'd switch with if you've got a beard of Brillo like mine that needs shaving every damned day.

"Do you have this gentleman's history, Miss Nelson?" asked Dr. Schatz, before talking to the patient.

Her prim lips got even tighter. "I'm afraid not, Doctor. He . . . says it would be like committing suicide to give it to me."

The little fellow nodded miserably.

"But we must have at least your name —" Dr. Schatz began.

He skittered clear over to the end of the bench and huddled there, shaking. "But that's exactly what I can't give you! Not only mine — *anybody's!*"

One thing you've got to say for these psychiatrists: they may feel surprised, but they never show it. Tell them you can't eat soup with anything except an egg-beater and they'll even manage to look as if they do that, too. I guess it's something you learn. I'm getting pretty good at it myself, but not when I come up against something as new as this twitch's line. I couldn't keep my eyebrows down.

Dr. Schatz, though, nodded and gave him a little smile and suggested going up to the mental hygiene office, where there wouldn't be so many people around. The little guy got up and came right along. They went into Schatz's office and I went to the room adjoining, with just a thin door I could hear through and open in a hurry if anything happened. You'd be surprised how seldom anything does happen, but it doesn't pay to take chances.

"Now, suppose you tell me what's bothering you," I heard Dr. Schatz say quietly. "Or isn't that possible, either?"

"Oh, I can tell you *that*," the little guy said. "I just can't tell you my — my name. Or yours, if I knew it. Or anyone else's."

"Why?"

The little guy was silent for a minute. I could hear him breathing hard and I knew he was pushing the words up to his mouth, trying to make them come out.

"When I say somebody's name three times," he whispered, "the person dies."

"I see." You can't throw Dr. Schatz that easy. "Only persons?"

"Well . . ." The little guy hitched his chair closer; I heard it shriek and grate on the cement floor. "Look, I'm here because it's driving me nuts, Doc. You think I am already, so I've got to convince you I'm not. I have to give you proof that I'm right."

The doctor waited. They always do at times like that; it kind of forces the patients to say things they maybe didn't want to.

"The first one was Willard Greenwood," said the little guy in a slow, tense voice. "You remember him — the Undersecretary down in Washington. A healthy man, right? Good career ahead of him. I see his name in the papers. Willard Greenwood. It has a . . . a *round* sound to it. I find myself saying it. I say it three times. Right out loud while I'm looking at his picture. So what happens?"

"Greenwood committed suicide last week," Dr. Schatz said. "He'd evidently had psychological difficulty for some time."

"Yes. I didn't think much about it. A coincidence, like. But then I see a newsreel of this submarine launching a few days ago. *The Barnacle.* I say the name out loud three times, same as anybody else might. You've done that yourself sometimes, haven't you? Haven't you?"

"Of course. Names occasionally have a fascination."

"Sure. So *The Barnacle* runs into something and sinks. I began to suspect what was going on so, like an experiment you might say, I picked another name out of the papers. I figured it ought to be somebody who isn't psycho, like Greenwood turned out to be, or old and sick, or a submarine which might be expected to run into danger. It had to be somebody young and healthy. I picked the name out of the school news. A girl named Clara Newland. Graduating from Emanuel High. Seventeen."

"She died?"

The little guy gave a kind of sob. "Automobile crash. She was the only one who was killed. The others all only got hurt. Last Sunday."

"Those could be coincidences, you know," Dr. Schatz said very gently. "Perhaps you said other names aloud and nothing happened, but you remember those because something did."

The guy kicked his chair back; I could hear it slide. He probably got up and leaned over the desk; they do that when they're all excited. I put my hand on the knob and got ready.

"As soon as I knew what was going on," he said, "I stopped saying names three times. I didn't dare say them even *once*, because that might make me say them again and then again — and you know what the payoff would be. But then last night . . ."

"Yes?" Dr. Schatz said, prompting him when he halted.

"A bar got held up. It was when the customers had left and the bartender was getting ready to lock the place. Two guys. There was a scuffle and the bartender was killed. The cops came. One of the crooks was shot; the other got away. The crook who was shot was —"

I opened the door a slit and looked in. He was showing a clipping to Schatz, with his finger pointing shakily at one place.

"Paul Michaels," said the doctor.

"Don't say it!" the little guy yelled. I was ready to race in, but Dr. Schatz made a warning motion that the guy wouldn't notice that told me I wasn't needed. "I don't want to say it! If I do, it'll be three times and he'll die!"

"I think I understand," Schatz said. "You're afraid to mention names three times because of the result, and — well, what do you want us to do?"

"Keep me here. Stop me from saying names three times. Save God knows how many people from me. Because I'm deadly!"

Schatz said we'd do our best, and he got the guy committed for observation. It wasn't easy, because he still wouldn't give his name, and Dr. Merriman, the head of the psychiatric department, almost had another heart attack fighting about it.

We got together, Dr. Schatz and I, after the little guy had his pajamas and stuff issued and a bed assigned to him.

"That's a hell of a thing to carry around," I said, "thinking people die when you say their names three times. It would drive anybody batty."

"A vestige of childhood," he told me, and explained how kids unconsciously believe their wishes can do anything. I could remember some of that from my own childhood — my old man was a holy terror with his strap and many's the time I wished he was dead — and then got scared that maybe he would die and it would all be my fault. But I outgrew it, which Schatz said most people do. Only there are some who don't, like our little nameless friend, and they often get themselves twisted up like this.

"But that Paul Michaels," I said. "The crook who got shot. He's in the critical ward right here in this hospital."

"It's a city hospital," he answered, lighting a butt and looking tired. "Everything the private hospitals won't touch, we get. That's why we have this patient, too."

"Any special instructions?" I asked.

"I don't think so. This kind of case is seldom either suicidal or homicidal, unless the guilt feelings get out of hand. Keep him calm, that's all. Sedation if he needs it."

I had plenty to do around the mental hygiene ward without the little guy to worry about, but he wasn't much trouble. Until about an hour or two after supper, that is. I had some beds to move around and a tough customer to get into the hydrotherapy room, so I didn't pay much attention to

the little guy and his restless eyes.

He came up to *me*, twitchy as hell, and grabbed my arm with both his hands.

"I keep thinking about that — that name," he babbled. "I keep wanting to say it. *Do* something! Don't let me say it!"

"Who?" I asked, blank for a minute, and then I remembered. "You mean this crook Paul Michaels —"

He got white and jumped up and tried to stop my mouth, but I'd already said it. I tried to calm him down and finally had the nurse give him some phenobarb, all the time explaining that the name had slipped out and I was sorry. You know, soothing him.

He said, trembling, "Now I know I'm going to say it. I just know I will." And he shuffled over to the window and sat there holding his head, looking sick.

I got to bed about midnight, still wondering about the poor little guy who thought he could kill people that easy. I had the next morning off, but I didn't take it. There were cops all over the place and Dr. Schatz looked real worried.

"I don't know how our new patient is going to take this," he said, shaking his head. "That Paul Michaels we had here —"

"*Had?*" I repeated. "What do you mean, had? He transferred to a prison hospital or something?"

"He's dead," Schatz said.

I closed my mouth after a few seconds. "Aw, nuts," I grumbled, disgusted with myself. "I was almost believing the little guy did it. Michaels was shot up bad. Hell, he was on the critical list."

"That's right. There'd be nothing remarkable if he died . . . from the bullet wound. But his throat was slit."

"And the little guy?"

"We have him full of Nembutal. He was shouting that he had said Michaels' name three times and that Michaels would have to die and he would be responsible."

"You haven't told him yet," I said.

"Naturally not. It would really put him into a spin."

It was a solid mess from top floor to basement, so I had to give up my morning off. The patients, except the little guy who was in isolation, all found out about Michaels somehow — you can't stop things like that from spreading — and I had a time handling them. In between, though, I learned how the case was developing.

There was this old cop Slattery we generally have for cases like Michaels sitting outside the critical ward, watching who went in and out. There had been somebody with Michaels on the stick-up, see, who made it while Michaels was plugged, and the cops don't take chances that maybe

the accomplice or someone from the underworld might want to get at the patient when he's helpless. They always put a guard on.

Well, Slattery is all right, but he maybe isn't so alert any more, and somebody slipped past him late at night, cut Michaels' neck with probably a razor blade, and then got out again without Slattery noticing. The other patients were all doped up or asleep, so they were no help. Slattery, though, swore nobody except nurses on duty in the ward or on the floor went past him. He claimed he didn't fall asleep once during the night, and the funny thing is the nurses said the same. Or maybe it's not so funny; they like the old man and might do a little lying to help him off a rough spot.

Well, that put the girls on an even worse spot. If they were telling the truth, that Slattery had been awake the whole night, then one of them must have done it. Because Slattery had said that only the nurses went in and out of the ward. Capt. Warren, the Homicide man, jumped on that fast and got the girls to line up in front of Slattery.

"Well, Slattery?" Warren said. "One of these nurses must have been the killer. Do you recognize one who went in there with no business to? Or did one of them act suspicious, and which was it?"

Slattery looked unhappy as he went down the line and stared at the girls' faces. He shook his head figuring, I guess, that he was in for some real trouble now.

"It was pretty dim in the ward," he mumbled. "All they keep on is a little night light — just enough so the girls can find their way around without tripping, but not bright enough to keep the patients awake. I can't even be sure which nurses went in and out."

"Nothing suspicious?" Slattery demanded.

"Search me. They were nurses and my job is to keep anybody else out. As long as they were nurses and it was so dim there, one of them could have had an army rifle under her uniform and I wouldn't know."

Capt. Warren questioned the girls, got nowhere, and had them all checked to see if one didn't know Michaels well enough to want to knock him off.

I got all that from Sally Norton, one of the homely babes in the mental hygiene ward, when she came back from the grilling to go on duty. She went to her locker to change and then ran back, yipping, and grabbed Dr. Schatz. She had her uniform held up in front of her, like a shield, kind of, and she was shaking it angrily.

"Just take a look at this, Doctor!" she said. "Came back clean from the laundry yesterday and I

haven't even worn it yet, and look at it now!"

"If there's anything wrong with the laundry, take it up with them," he said, annoyed. "I'm having enough trouble keeping my patients quiet with all this racket going on over Michaels."

"But that's just it. I wouldn't be surprised if it has something to do with Michaels." And she showed him the sleeve, where there were red spots down near the wrist.

Schatz called in Capt. Warren and Dr. Merriman, the head of the mental hygiene department. Merriman looked sicker than usual; he kept his hand inside his jacket, over his heart. All this excitement wasn't doing him any more good than it was doing the patients.

Warren was interested, all right. Being there in the hospital, it was easy to run a test and prove the spots were blood, human, Type B — which happened to be Michaels' blood type. He wasn't the only one in the hospital with that type, of course, but it isn't so common that Capt. Warren could disregard it.

Warren started to give Sally a bad time, but Dr. Merriman cut in and told him about the little guy and the story about saying names three times.

"What in hell kind of nonsense is this?" Warren asked. "I'm looking for evidence, not a screwball fairy tale some nut thought up."

"Exactly," Dr. Schatz said fast; he'd been trying to head off Dr. Merriman, but hadn't dared to interrupt. "It's a fairly typical delusion with no more basis in fact than witches or goblins. I can't sanction questioning a disturbed patient because of it."

"You don't have to bother," said Warren. "I've got more important things —"

"The point," Dr. Merriman went on, "is that this man claimed he was afraid to mention — specifically, mind you — the name of Paul Michaels. That was why he wanted to be committed, in fact."

Warren looked baffled. "You mean you think he said Michaels' name three times and Michaels died because of that?"

"Certainly not," Merriman said stiffly. "It's a remarkable coincidence that deserves investigation, that's all. Or perhaps my idea of police work differs from yours."

I don't know how Schatz managed it, but he let Capt. Warren know that Dr. Merriman was getting on in years and ought to be humored. So I went along with them to the little guy's bed, where he was just coming out of the sedative. He was still groggy, but he saw us coming and ducked his left hand under the blanket.

Well, that's all you have to do to get a cop suspicious, make a

sudden move like running out of a bank at high noon or duck one hand under a blanket. Warren hauled it out, with the little guy resisting and trying to hide his pinky in his palm. The cop straightened out the pinky. It was colored red under the fingernail.

"Blood?" I asked, confused, and then got busy because the little guy was trying to pull away while Capt. Warren took some scrapings.

It wasn't blood. It was lipstick, according to the lab test.

"There," said Dr. Schatz, satisfied, "you see? You've upset my patient, and for what?"

"Plenty," Warren said between his teeth, "and I'm going to upset him some more."

He had me hold the little guy down — I didn't want to until Dr. Merriman overrode Schatz's objections and ordered me to — while two cops put the little guy into Sally Norton's stained uniform and painted his mouth with lipstick.

You know, with that slender build of his and the cap on, he didn't look bad. Better than Sally, if you want to know, but who doesn't?

"All right," Schatz said, "he could have gotten past Slattery in that dim light. Admitted. But what makes you think he did? And why should he have done so?"

"The lipstick on the pinky," said Warren. "If you want to do a decent job, you don't just slap it on — you shape it with your little finger. Why? That depends. If the guy's psycho, he could have done Michaels in just because. But suppose he's the guy who was with Michaels on the job — Michaels was the only one who could have identified him. But Michaels was in a coma. So this character had to get into the hospital somehow and slit Michaels' throat to keep him from talking. Either way, it figures."

Dr. Merriman nodded. "That was my own opinion, Captain."

"You're lying! You're lying!" the little guy screamed. "I said his name three times and he died! They always die! It's the curse I have to bear!"

"We'll see," said Dr. Merriman. "Say *my* name three times."

The little guy cowered away. "I — I can't. I have enough deaths on my conscience now."

"You heard me!" Dr. Merriman shouted, turning a dangerous red in the face. "Say my name three times!"

The little guy looked appealingly at Dr. Schatz, who said soothingly, "Go ahead. I know you're convinced it works, but it's completely contrary to logic. Wishes *can't* kill. This may prove it to you."

The little guy said Dr. Merriman's name three times, pale and

shaking and looking about ready to throw up with fear.

Warren put Slattery — *and* another guard — on the psycho ward, and started a check on the little guy's fingerprints.

When I got to work the next day, the ward was a tomb. It might as well have been. Sally Norton was crying and Dr. Schatz was all pinch-faced and the little guy was practically running around the room yelling that he shouldn't have been forced to do it.

"Do what?" I wanted to know.

"Dr. Merriman died last night," Schatz said.

I looked at the little guy in horror. "Him?"

"No, no, of course not," said Schatz, but it was in a flat voice, not the impatient way he would have told me a day ago. "Dr. Merriman had a cardiac lesion. He could have gone at any time. There may even have been a deep unconscious wish to escape the pain and fear, and this patient's delusion could have given Dr. Merriman a psychological escape. It's the principle behind voodooism. The victim wills himself to death; the hexer merely supplies the suggestion."

It was pretty bad for a while, until Capt. Warren showed up with a big grin on his face. It soured when he heard that Dr.

(*Continued on page 162*)

SCIENCE-FICTION rejects the premise that man can travel back into the past through the medium of a time machine, and that by doing so he can become his own grandfather. Obviously, this is ridiculous!

But is it?

Try this simple formula:

Marry a woman with a good-looking daughter.

Your father, the old codger, likes pretty young girls, so he marries your pretty young stepdaughter, thus becoming your son-in-law, while your pretty young stepdaughter becomes your mother, since she's your father's wife.

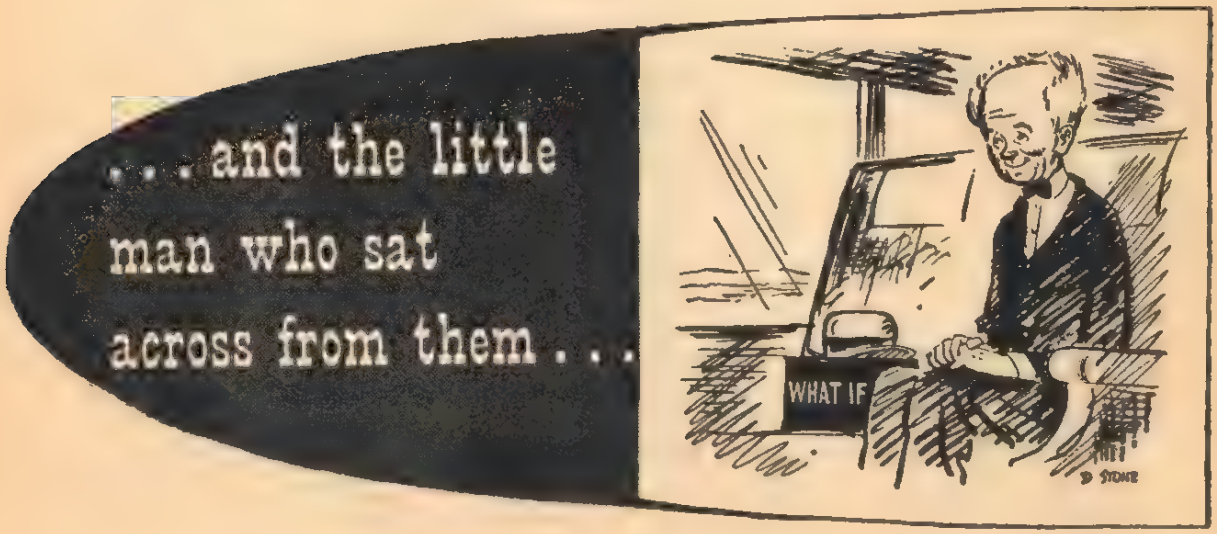
Now, your wife gives birth to a son — your son who is also your father's brother-in-law and your uncle as the brother of your step-mother.

So, not to be outdone, your father and mother have a son too, and their son is your brother and your grandchild too.

Thus, your wife being your mother's mother is your grandmother, while you're her husband and grandchild too. And since your wife's husband would be her grandchild's grandfather, you're — that's right!

what if

By Isaac Asimov



illustrator: David Stone

Whenever the role of competent writers of science fiction is taken, Isaac Asimov places high on the list. Not only have many of his short stories been anthologized, but his novels "The Stars Like Dust" and "Pebble in the Sky" were brought out by Doubleday & Co. — publishers not given to grabbing just anything that comes along!

While Dr. Asimov's forte is the robot's place in tomorrow's universe (Earth is pretty small potatoes in stories of the future!), he drops Metal Man this time to give you a tender and compelling tale of a married couple who wondered "what if" they had never met — and who found the answer to be strangely rewarding. . . .

NORMAN and Livvy were late, naturally, since catching a train is always a matter of last-minute delays, so they had to take the only available seat in the coach. It was the one toward the front; the one with nothing before it but the seat that faced wrong-way with its back hard against the front partition. While Norman heaved the suitcase onto the rack, Livvy found herself chafing a little.

If a couple took the wrong-way seat before them, they would be staring self-consciously into each others' faces all the hours it would take to reach New York, or else, which was scarcely better, they would have to erect synthetic barriers of newspaper. Still, there was no use in taking a chance on there being another unoccupied double seat elsewhere in the train.

Norman didn't seem to mind and that was a little disappointing to Livvy. Usually, they held their moods in common. That, Norman claimed, was why he remained sure that he had married the right girl.

He would say, "We fit each other, Livvy, and that's the key fact. When you're doing a jigsaw puzzle and one piece fits another, that's it. There are no other possibilities, and of course there are no other girls."

And she would laugh and say, "If you hadn't been on the streetcar that day, you would probably never have met me. What would you have done then?"

"Stayed a bachelor. Naturally. Besides, I would have met you through Georgette another day."

"It wouldn't have been the same."

"Sure it would."

"No, it wouldn't. Besides, Georgette would never have introduced me. She was interested in you herself, and she's the type who knows better than to create a possible rival."

"What nonsense."

Livvy asked her favorite question: "Norman, what if you had been one minute later at the streetcar corner and had taken the next car? What *do* you suppose would have happened?"

"And what if fish had wings and all of them flew to the top of the mountains? What would we have to eat on Fridays then?"

But we *had* caught the streetcar and fish *didn't* have wings, so that now they were married five years and ate fish on Friday. And because they had been married five years, they were going to celebrate by spending a week in New York.

Then she remembered the present problem. "I wish we could have found some other seat."

Norman said, "Sure. So do I. But no one has taken it yet, so we'll have relative privacy as far as Providence anyway."

Livvy was unconsoled and felt justified at the fact when a plump little man walked down the central aisle of the coach. Now, where had he come from? The train was half-way between Boston and Providence, and if he had had a seat why hadn't he kept it? She took out her vanity and considered her reflection. She had a theory that if she ignored the little man, he would pass by. So she concentrated on her light brown hair which, in the rush of catching the train, had become disarranged just a little, at her blue eyes and at her little mouth with the plump lips which Norman said looked like a permanent kiss.

Not bad, she thought.

Then she looked up and the little man was in the seat opposite. He caught her eye and grinned

widely. A series of lines curled about the edges of his smile. He lifted his hat hastily and put it down beside him on top of the little black box he had been carrying. A circle of white hair instantly sprang up stiffly about the large bald spot that made the center of his skull a desert.

She could not help smiling back a little, but then she caught sight of the black box again and the smile faded. She yanked at Norman's elbow.

Norman looked up from his newspaper. He had startlingly dark eyebrows that almost met above the bridge of his nose, giving him a formidable first appearance. But they and the dark eyes beneath bent upon her now with only the usual look of pleased and somewhat amused affection.

He said, "What's up?" He did not look at the plump little man opposite.

Livvy did her best to indicate what she saw by a little unobtrusive gesture of her hand and head. But the little man was watching and she felt a fool, since Norman simply stared at her blankly.

Finally, she pulled him closer and whispered, "Don't you see what's printed on his box?"

She looked again as she said it and there was no mistake. It was not very prominent, but the light caught it slantingly and it was a slightly more glistening area on a black background. In flowing script, it said, "What If."

The little man was smiling again. He nodded his head rapidly and pointed to the words and then to himself several times over.

Norman said in an aside, "Must be his name."

Livvy replied, "Oh, how could that be anybody's name?"

Norman put his paper aside, "I'll show you." He leaned over and said, "Mister If?"

The little man looked at him eagerly.

"Do you have the time, Mr. If?"

The little man took out a large watch from his vest pocket and displayed the dial.

"Thank you, Mr. If," said Norman. And again in a whisper, "See, Livvy."

He would have returned to his paper, but the little man was opening his box and raising a finger periodically as he did so, to enforce their attention. It was just a slab of frosted glass that he removed — about six by nine inches in length and width and perhaps an inch thick. It had beveled edges, rounded corners and was completely featureless. Then he took out a little wire stand on which the glass slab fitted comfortably. He rested the combination on his knees and looked proudly at them.

Livvy said, with sudden excitement, "Heavens, Norman, it's a

picture of some sort."

Norman bent close. Then he looked at the little man. "What's this? A new kind of television?"

The little man shook his head and Livvy said, "No, Norman, it's *us*."

"What?"

"Don't you see? That's the streetcar we met on. There you are in the back seat wearing that old fedora I threw away three years ago. And that's Georgette and myself getting on. The fat lady's in the way. Now! Can't you see us?"

He muttered, "It's some sort of illusion."

"But you see it too, don't you? That's why he calls this 'What If'. It will *show* us what if. What if the streetcar hadn't swerved . . ."

She was sure of it. She was very excited and very sure of it. As she looked at the picture in the glass slab, the late afternoon sunshine grew dimmer, and the inchoate hum of the passengers around and behind them began fading.

How she remembered that day. Norman knew Georgette and had been about to surrender his seat to her when the car swerved and threw Livvy into his lap. It was such a ridiculously corny situation, but it had worked. She had been so embarrassed that he was forced first into gallantry and then into conversation. An introduction from Georgette was not even necessary. By the time they got off the streetcar, he knew where she worked.

She could still remember Georgette glowering at her, sulkily forcing a smile when they themselves separated. Georgette said, "Norman seems to like you."

Livvy replied, "Oh, don't be silly! He was just being polite. But he is nice-looking, isn't he?"

It was only six months after that that they married.

And now here was that same streetcar again with Norman and herself and Georgette. As she thought that, the smooth train noises, the rapid clack-clack of the wheels vanished completely. Instead, she was in the swaying confines of the streetcar. She had just boarded it with Georgette at the previous stop.

Livvy shifted weight with the swaying of the streetcar, as did forty others, sitting and standing, all to the same monotonous and rather ridiculous rhythm. She said, "Somebody's motioning at you, Georgy. Do you know him?"

"At me?" Georgette directed a deliberately casual glance over her shoulder. Her artificially-long eyelashes flickered. She said, "I know him a little. What do you suppose he wants?"

"Let's find out," said Livvy. She felt pleased and a little wicked. Georgette had a well-known habit of hoarding her male acquaintances, and it was rather fun

to annoy her this way. And besides, this one seemed quite . . . interesting.

She snaked past the line of standees and Georgette followed without enthusiasm. It was just as Livvy arrived opposite the young man's seat that the streetcar lurched heavily as it rounded a curve. Livvy snatched desperately in the direction of the straps. Her fingertips caught and she held on. It was a long moment before she could breathe. For some reason, it had seemed that there were no straps close enough to be reached. Somehow, she felt that by all the laws of Nature she should have fallen.

The young man did not look at her. He was smiling at Georgette and rising from his seat. He had astonishing eyebrows which gave him a rather competent and self-confident appearance. Livvy decided that she definitely liked him.

Georgette was saying, "Oh no, don't bother. We're getting off in about two stops."

They did. Livvy said, "I thought we were going to Sach's."

"We are. There's just something I remember having to attend to here. It won't take but a minute."

"Next stop, Providence!" The loud-speakers were blaring. The train was slowing, and the world of the past had shrunk itself into the glass slab once more. The little man was still smiling at them.

Livvy turned to Norman. She felt a little frightened. "Were you through all that, too?"

He said, "What happened to the time? We *can't* be reaching Providence yet?" He looked at his watch. "I guess we are." Then, to Livvy, "You didn't fall that time."

"Then you *did* see it?" She frowned, "Now, that's like Georgette. I'm sure there was no reason to get off the streetcar except to prevent my meeting you. How long had you known Georgette before then, Norman?"

"Not very long. Just enough to be able to recognize her at sight and to feel that I ought to offer her my seat."

Livvy curled her lip.

Norman grinned, "You can't be jealous of a might-have-been, kid. Besides, what difference would it have made? I'd have been sufficiently interested in you to work out a way of meeting you."

"You didn't even look at me."

"I hardly had the chance."

"Then how would you have met me?"

"Some way. I don't know how. But you'll admit this is a rather foolish argument we're having."

They were leaving Providence. Livvy felt a trouble in her mind. The little man had been following their whispered conversation with only the loss of his smile to show

that he understood. She said to him, "Can you show us more?"

Norman interrupted, "Wait now, Livvy. What are you going to try to do?"

She said, "I want to see our wedding day. What it would have been if I had caught the strap."

Norman was visibly annoyed, "Now that's not fair. We might not have been married on the same day, you know."

But she said, "Can you show it to me, Mr. If?" and the little man nodded.

The slab of glass was coming alive again, glowing a little. Then the light collected and condensed into figures. A tiny sound of organ music was in Livvy's ears, without there actually being sound.

Norman said with relief, "Well, there I am. That's our wedding. Are you satisfied?"

The train sounds were disappearing again and the last thing Livvy heard was her own voice saying, "Yes, there *you* are. But where am *I?*"

Livvy was well back in the pews. For a while, she had not expected to attend at all. In the past months she had drifted further and further away from Georgette without quite knowing why. She had heard of her engagement only through a mutual friend and, of course, it was to Norman. She remembered very clearly that day, six months ago, when she had first seen him on the streetcar. It was the time Georgette had so quickly snatched her out of sight. She had met him since on several occasions, but each time Georgette was with him, standing between.

Well, she had no cause for resentment; the man was certainly none of hers. Georgette she thought looked more beautiful than she really was. And *he* was very handsome indeed.

She felt sad and rather empty, as though something had gone wrong; something which she could not quite outline in her mind. Georgette had moved up the aisle without seeming to see her, but earlier she had caught *his* eyes and smiled at him. Livvy thought he had smiled in return.

She heard the words distantly as they drifted back to her, "I now pronounce you —"

The noise of the train was back. A woman swayed down the aisle, herding a little boy back to their seat. There were intermittent bursts of girlish laughter from a set of four teen-age girls half-way down the coach. A conductor hurried past on some mysterious errand.

Livvy was frozenly aware of it all.

She sat there, staring straight ahead, while the trees outside blended into a fuzzy, furious green and the telephone poles galloped past.

She said, "It was *she* you married."

He stared at her for a moment and then one side of his mouth quirked a little. He said, lightly, "I didn't really, Olivia. You're still my wife, you know. Just think about it for a few minutes."

She turned to him. "Yes, you married me — because I fell in your lap. If I hadn't, you would have married Georgette. If she hadn't wanted you, you would have married someone else. You would have married *anybody*. So much for your jigsaw puzzle pieces."

Norman said very slowly, "Well — I'll — be — darned!" He put both hands to his head and smoothed down the straight hair over his ears where it had a tendency to tuft up. For the moment it gave him the appearance of trying to hold his head together. He said, "Now, look here, Livvy, you're making a silly fuss over a stupid magician's trick. You can't blame me for something I haven't done."

"You would have done it."

"How do you know?"

"You've seen it."

"I've seen a ridiculous piece of — of hypnotism, I suppose." His voice suddenly raised itself into anger. He turned to the little man opposite. "Off with you, Mr. If, or whatever your name is. Get out of here. We don't want you. Get out before I throw your little trick out the window and you after it."

Livvy yanked at his elbow, "Stop it. *Stop it!* You're in a crowded train."

The little man shrank back into the corner of the seat as far as he might go and held his little black bag behind him. Norman looked at him, then at Livvy, then at the elderly lady across the way who was regarding him with patent disapproval.

He turned pink and bit back a pungent remark. They rode in frozen silence to and through New London.

Fifteen minutes past New London, Norman said, "Livvy!"

She said nothing. She was looking out the window but saw nothing but the glass.

He said again, "Livvy! Livvy! Answer me!"

She said, dully, "What do you want?"

He said, "Look, this is all nonsense. I don't know how the fellow does it, but even granting it's legitimate, you're not being fair. Why stop where you did? Suppose I *had* married Georgette, do you suppose *you* would have stayed single? For all I know, you were already married at the time of my supposed wedding. Maybe that's why I married Georgette."

"I wasn't married."

"How do you know?"

"I would have been able to tell. I knew what my own thoughts were."

"Then you would have been married within the next year."

Livvy grew angrier. The fact that a sane remnant within her clamored at the unreason of her anger did not soothe her. It irritated her further, instead. She said, "And if I did, it would be no business of yours, certainly."

"Of course it wouldn't. But it would make the point that in the world of reality we can't be held responsible for the 'what ifs'."

Livvy's nostrils flared. She said nothing.

Norman said, "Look! You remember the big New Year's celebration at Winnie's place year before last?"

"I certainly do. You spilled a keg of alcohol all over me."

"That's beside the point, and besides it was only a cocktail shaker's worth. What I'm trying to say is that Winnie is just about your best friend and had been long before you married me."

"What of it?"

"Georgette was a good friend of hers too, wasn't she?"

"Yes."

"All right, then. You and Georgette would have gone to the party regardless of which one of you I married. I would have had nothing to do with it. Let him show us the party as it would have been if I had married Georgette, and I'll bet you'd be there with either your fiancé or your husband."

Livvy hesitated. She felt honestly afraid of just that.

He said, "Are you afraid to take the chance?"

And that of course decided her. She turned on him furiously, "No, I'm not! And I hope I *am* married. There's no reason I should pine for you. What's more, I'd like to see what happens when you spill the shaker all over Georgette. She'll fill both your ears for you and in public, too. I know *her*. Maybe you'll see a certain difference in the jigsaw pieces then." She faced forward and crossed her arms angrily and firmly across her chest.

Norman looked across at the little man but there was no need to say anything. The glass slab was on his lap already. The sun slanted in from the west and the white foam of hair that topped his head was edged with pink.

Norman said, tensely, "Ready?"

Livvy nodded, and let the noise of the train slide away again.

Livvy stood, a little flushed with recent cold, in the doorway. She had just removed her coat, with its sprinkling of snow, and her bare arms were still rebelling at the touch of open air.

She answered the shouts that greeted her with "Happy New Years" of her own, raising her voice to make herself heard over the squealing of the radio. Georgette's shrill tones were almost the

first thing she heard upon entering and now she steered toward her. She hadn't seen Georgette, or Norman, in weeks.

Georgette lifted an eyebrow, a mannerism she had lately cultivated, and said, "Isn't anyone with you, Olivia?" Her eyes swept the immediate surroundings and then returned to Livvy.

Livvy said, indifferently, "I think Dick will be around later. There was something or other he had to do first." She felt as indifferent as she sounded.

Georgette smiled tightly, "Well, Norman's here. That ought to keep you from being lonely, dear. At least, it's turned out that way before."

And as she said so, Norman sauntered in from the kitchen. He had a cocktail shaker in his hand and the rattling of ice cubes castanetted his words, "Line up, you rioting revelers, and get a mixture which will really revel your riots — Why, Livvy!"

He walked toward her, grinning his welcome. "Where've you been keeping yourself? I haven't seen you in twenty years, seems like. What's the matter? Doesn't Dick want anyone else to see you?"

"Fill my glass, Norman," said Georgette sharply.

"Right away," he said, not looking at her. "Do you want one too, Livvy? I'll get you a glass." He turned, and everything happened at once.

Livvy cried, "Watch out!" She saw it coming; even had a vague feeling that all this had happened before, but it played itself out inexorably. His heel caught the edge of the carpet; he lurched, tried to right himself, and lost the cocktail shaker. It seemed to jump out of his hands, and a pint of ice-cold liquor drenched Livvy from shoulder to hem.

She stood there, gasping. The noises muted about her, and for a few intolerable moments she made futile brushing gestures at her gown, while Norman kept repeating, "Damnation!" in rising tones.

Georgette said, coolly, "It's too bad, Livvy. Just one of those things. I imagine the dress can't be very expensive."

Livvy turned and ran. She was in the bedroom, which was at least empty and relatively quiet. By the light of the fringe-shaded lamp on the dresser, she poked among the coats on the bed, looking for her own.

Norman had come in behind her. "Look, Livvy, don't pay any attention to what she said. I'm really devilishly sorry. I'll pay —"

"That's all right. It wasn't your fault." She blinked rapidly and didn't look at him. "I'll just go home and change."

"Are you coming back?"

"I don't know. I don't think so."

"Look, Livvy . . ." His warm fingers were on her shoulders —

Livvy felt a queer tearing sensation deep inside her, as though she were ripping away from clinging cobwebs and —

— and the train noises were back.

Something *did* go wrong with the time when she was in there — in the slab. It was deep twilight now. The train-lights were on. But it didn't matter. She seemed to be recovering from the wrench inside her.

Norman was rubbing his eyes with thumb and forefinger, "What happened?"

Livvy said, "It just ended. Suddenly."

Norman said, uneasily, "You know, we'll be putting into New Haven soon." He looked at his watch and shook his head.

Livvy said, wonderingly, "You spilled it on me."

"Well, so I did in real life."

"But in real life I was your wife. You ought to have spilled it on Georgette this time. Isn't that queer?" But she was thinking of Norman pursuing her; his hands on her shoulders. . . .

She looked up at him, and said with warm satisfaction, "I wasn't married."

"No, you weren't. But was that Dick Reinhardt you were going around with?"

"Yes."

"You weren't planning to marry him, were you, Livvy?"

"Jealous, Norman?"

Norman looked confused. "Of that? Of a slab of glass? Of course not."

"I don't think I would have married him."

Norman said, "You know, I wish it hadn't ended when it did. There was something that was about to happen, I think." He stopped, then added slowly, "It was as though I would rather have done it to anybody else in the room."

"Even to Georgette."

"I wasn't giving two thoughts to Georgette. You don't believe me, I suppose."

"Maybe I do." She looked up at him. "I've been silly, Norman. Let's — let's live our real life. Let's not play with all the things that just might have been."

But he caught her hands. "No, Livvy. One last time. Let's see what we would have been doing right now. Right now, Livvy! This very minute! If I had married Georgette."

Livvy was a little frightened. "Let's not, Norman." She was thinking of his eyes, smiling hungrily at her as he held the shaker, while Georgette stood beside her, unregarded. She didn't *want* to know what happened afterward. She just wanted this life now, this *good* life.

New Haven came and went.

Norman said again, "I want to try, Livvy."

She said, "If you want to, Norman." She decided fiercely that it wouldn't matter. Nothing would matter. Her hands reached out and encircled his arm. She held it tightly, and while she held it she thought: nothing in the make-believe can take him from me.

Norman said to the little man, "Set 'em up again."

In the yellow light, the process seemed to be slower. Gently, the frosted slab cleared, like clouds being torn apart and dispersed by an unfelt wind.

Norman was saying, "There's something wrong. That's just the two of us, exactly as we are now."

He was right. Two little figures were sitting in a train on the seats which were furthest toward the front. The field was enlarging now — they were merging into it. Norman's voice was distant and fading.

"It's the same train," he was saying. "The window in back is cracked just as —"

Livvy was blindingly happy. She said, "I wish we were in New York."

He said, "It will be less than an hour, darling." Then he said, "I'm going to kiss you." He made a movement, as though he were about to begin.

"Not here! Oh, Norman, people are looking."

Norman drew back. He said, "We should have taken a taxi."

"From Boston to New York?"

"Sure. The privacy would have been worth it."

She laughed, "You're funny when you try to act ardent."

"It isn't an act." His voice was suddenly a little somber. "It's not just an hour, you know. I feel as though I've been waiting five years."

"I do, too."

"Why couldn't I have met you first? It was such a waste."

"Poor Georgette." Livvy sighed.

Norman moved impatiently, "Don't be sorry for her, Livvy. We never really made a go of it. She was glad to get rid of me."

"I know that. That's why I say 'Poor Georgette.' I'm just sorry for her for not being able to appreciate what she had."

"Well, see to it that *you* do," he said. "See to it that you're immensely appreciative, infinitely appreciative — or more than that, see that you're at least half as appreciative as I am of what *I've* got."

"Or else you'll divorce me, too?"

"Over my dead body," said Norman.

Livvy said, "It's all so strange. I keep thinking: what if you hadn't spilt the cocktails on me that time at the party. You wouldn't have followed me out; you wouldn't have told me; I wouldn't have known. It would

have been so different . . . everything."

"Nonsense. It would have been just the same. It would have all happened another time."

"I wonder," said Livvy softly.

Train noises merged into train noises. City lights flickered outside and the atmosphere of New York was about them. The coach was astir with travellers dividing the baggage among themselves.

Livvy was an island in the turmoil until Norman shook her.

She looked at him and said, "The jigsaw pieces fit after all."

He said, "Yes."

She put a hand on his. "But it wasn't good just the same. I was very wrong. I thought that because we had each other, we should have all the *possible* each others. But all the possibles are none of our business. The real is enough. Do you know what I mean?"

He nodded.

She said, "There are millions of other *what-if's*. I don't want to know what happened in any of them. I'll never say 'What if' again."

Norman said, "Relax, dear. Here's your coat." And he reached for the suitcases.

Livvy said, with sudden sharpness, "Where's Mr. If?"

Norman turned slowly to the empty seat that faced them. Together they scanned the rest of the coach.

"Maybe," Norman said, "he went into the next coach."

"But why? Besides, he wouldn't leave his hat." And she bent to pick it up.

Norman said, "What hat?"

And Livvy stopped, her fingers hovering over nothingness. She said, "It was here — I almost touched it." She straightened and said, "Oh, Norman, what if —"

Norman put a finger on her mouth, "Darling . . ."

She said, "I'm sorry. Here, let me help you with the suitcases."

The train dived into the tunnel beneath Park Avenue, and the noise of the wheels rose to a roar.

MYSTICS always hope that science will someday overtake them.

— Booth Tarkington

And a Word from the Dead:

APPARENTLY what Houdini couldn't do, famous writer George Bernard Shaw easily accomplished. From the year-old corpse, a spiritualist medium reports a series of complaints: (1) he's been cheated out of oblivion, (2) he suffered "the most undignified and self-humiliating experience" when angels made him wear a nightgown, (3) death does not kill, it only destroys the memory.

A
CLASSIC
Reprint

Professor Bingo's Snuff

A NOVEL BY RAYMOND CHANDLER

PROFESSOR BINGO'S SNUFF

We don't have to tell you who Raymond Chandler is, or what he has written. The man who, back in the Thirties, almost single-handedly lifted detective fiction out of the post-Van Dine doldrums, has a secure and lofty place in American literature. More than anyone else he brought the hardboiled "private eye" story to popularity — and kept it there despite the swarm of imitators who have done their worst to wreck the genre.

To our knowledge, Professor Bingo's Snuff is Mr. Chandler's second — and longest — fantasy. It will not at all surprise you that his talent brings added luster to that field.

AT TEN o'clock in the morning already the dance music. Loud. Boom, boom. Boom, boom, boom. The tone control way down in the bass. It almost made the floor vibrate. Behind the purring of the electric razor that Joe Pettigrew was running up and down his face it vibrated in the floors and walls. He seemed to feel it with his toes. It seemed to run up his legs. The neighbors must love it.

Already at ten o'clock in the morning the ice cubes in the glass, the flushed cheek, the slightly glazed eye, the silly smile, the loud laughter about nothing at all.

He pulled the plug loose and the purring of the razor stopped. As he ran his fingertips along the angle of his jaw his eyes met the eyes in the mirror with a somber stare.

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"Washed up," he said between his teeth. "At fifty-two you're senile. I'm surprised you're there at all. I'm surprised I can see you."

He blew the fluff out of the shaving head of the razor, put the protective cap back on it, wound the cord around it carefully, and put it away in the drawer. He got out the after-shaving lotion, rubbed it into his face, dusted it with powder, and carefully wiped the powder off with a hand towel.

He scowled at the rather gaunt face in the glass and turned and looked out of the bathroom window. Not much smog this morning. Quite sunny and clear. You could see the city hall. Who wants to see the city hall? The hell with the city hall. He went out of the bathroom, putting his coat on as he started down the stairs. Boom, boom. Boom, boom, boom. Like back in a cheap dive where you could smell smoke and sweat, and perfume of a sort. The living room door was half open. He moved in through it and stood looking at the two of them, cheek-to-cheek, drifting slowly around the room. They danced close together, dreamy-eyed, in a world of their own. Not drunk. Just lit enough to like the music loud. He stood there and watched them. As they turned and saw him they hardly looked at him. Gladys' lips curled a little in a faint sneer, very faint. Porter Green had a cigarette in the corner of his mouth, and his eyes half-closed against the smoke. A tall, dark fellow, with a sprinkling of gray in his hair. Well dressed. A bit shifty-eyed. Might be a used car salesman. Might be anything that didn't take too much work or too much honesty. The music stopped and somebody started to spiel a commercial. The dancing couple broke apart. Porter Green stepped over and turned the volume control down. Gladys stood in the middle of the floor looking at Joe Pettigrew.

"Any little thing we can do for you, sweetheart?" she asked him in a clear, contemptuous voice.

He shook his head without answering.

"Then you can do something for me. Drop dead." She opened her mouth wide and went off into a peal of laughter.

"Cut it," Porter Green said. "Stop picking on him, Glad. So he doesn't like dance music. So what? There are things you don't like, aren't there?"

"Sure there are," Gladys said. "Him."

Porter Green moved over and picked up a whiskey bottle, began to load the two tall highball glasses on the coffee table.

"How about a drink, Joe?" he asked, without looking up.

Joe Pettigrew again shook his head slightly and said nothing.

"He can do tricks," Gladys said. "He's almost human. But he can't talk."

"Aw, shut up," Porter Green said, wearily. He stood up with the two full glasses in his hand. "Listen, Joe, I'm buying the liquor. You're not worrying about that, are you? No? Well, that's fine." He handed a glass to Gladys. They both drank, looking across the glasses at Joe Pettigrew standing silent in the doorway.

"You know, I married that," Gladys said thoughtfully. "I really did. I wonder what kind of sleep medicine I'd been taking."

Joe Pettigrew stepped back into the hallway and half closed the door. Gladys stared at it. In a changed tone, she said, "Just the same, he scares me. He just stands there and don't say anything. Never complains. Never gets mad. What do you suppose goes on inside his head?"

The commercial spieler ended his stint and put on a new record. Porter Green stepped across and turned the volume up again, then turned it down. "I think I could guess," he said. "After all it's a pretty old story." He turned the volume up again and held his arms out.

II

Joe Pettigrew stepped out on the front porch, put the heavy old-fashioned front door on the latch, and closed it behind him to muffle the boom of the radio. Looking along the front of the house he saw that the front windows were closed. It wasn't so loud out here. These old frame houses were pretty solidly built. He was just starting to think whether the grass needed cutting when a funny looking man turned up the concrete walk toward him. Once in a while you see a man in an opera cloak. But not on Lexington Avenue in that block. Not in the middle of the morning. And not wearing a top hat. Joe Pettigrew stared at the top hat. It was definitely not new, definitely on the rusty side. A bit rough in the nap like a cat's fur when the cat isn't feeling too well. And the opera cloak wasn't anything Adrian would have wanted to autograph. The man had a sharp nose and deep-set black eyes. He was pale but he didn't look sick. He stopped at the foot of the steps and looked up at Joe Pettigrew.

"Good morning," he said, touching the edge of the topper.

"Morning," Joe Pettigrew said. "What are you selling today?"

"I'm not selling magazines," the man in the opera cloak said.

"Not at this address, friend."

"Nor am I about to inquire if you have a photograph of yourself that would tint up in beautiful watercolors as transparent as moonlight on the Matterhorn." The man put a hand under his opera cloak.

"Don't tell me you've got a vacuum cleaner under that cloak,"

Joe Pettigrew said wryly.

"Nor," went on the man in the opera cloak, "do I have an all-stainless-steel kitchen in my hip pocket. Not that I couldn't have, if I chose."

"But you *are* selling something," Joe Pettigrew said dryly.

"I am bestowing something," the man in the opera cloak said. "On the right persons. A carefully selected —"

"A suit club," Joe Pettigrew said disgustedly. "I didn't know they had them any more."

The tall skinny man brought his hand out from under the cloak with a card in it.

"A carefully selected few," he repeated. "I don't know. I'm lazy this morning. Perhaps I shall only select one."

"The jackpot," Joe Pettigrew said. "Me."

The man held the card out. Joe Pettigrew took it and read "Professor Augustus Bingo." Then in smaller letters in the corner, "White Eagle Depilatory Powder." There was a telephone number and an address on North Wilcox. Joe Pettigrew flicked the card with a fingernail and shook his head. "Never use it, friend."

Professor Augustus Bingo smiled very faintly. Or rather his lips pulled back a fraction of an inch and his eyes crinkled at the corners. Call it a smile. It wasn't big enough to argue about. He put his hand under his cloak again, came out with a small round box about the size of a typewriter ribbon box. He held it up and sure enough it said on it "White Eagle Depilatory Powder."

"I presume you know what depilatory powder is, Mister —"

"Pettigrew," Joe Pettigrew said amiably. "Joe Pettigrew."

"Ah, my instinct was right," Professor Bingo remarked. "You are in trouble." He tapped on the round box with his long pointed finger. "This, Mr. Pettigrew, is not depilatory powder."

"Wait a minute," Joe Pettigrew said. "First it's depilatory powder, then it isn't. And I'm in trouble. Why? Because my name is Pettigrew?"

"All in good time, Mr. Pettigrew. Let me establish the background. This is a run-down neighborhood. No longer desirable. But your house is not run-down. It is old but well-kept. Therefore, you own it."

"Say I own a piece of it," Joe Pettigrew said.

The Professor held up his left hand, palm outwards. "Quiet, please. I continue with my analysis. The taxes are high and you own the house. If you were able, you would have moved away. Why have you not? Because you can't sell this property. But it is a large house. Therefore you have roomers."

"One roomer," Joe Pettigrew

said. "Just one." He sighed.

"You are about forty-eight years of age," the Professor suggested.

"Give or take four years," Joe Pettigrew said.

"You are shaved and neatly dressed. Yet you have an unhappy expression. Therefore I postulate a young wife. Spoiled, exacting. I also postulate —" He broke off abruptly and began to pull the lid off the box of something that was not depilatory powder. "I have ceased to postulate," he said calmly. "This," he held out the uncovered box, and Joe Pettigrew could see that it was half-full of a white powder, "is not Copenhagen snuff."

"I'm a patient man," Joe Pettigrew said. "But just lay off telling me what it isn't and tell me what it is."

"It is snuff," the Professor said coldly. "Professor Bingo's snuff. *My* snuff."

"Never use snuff either," Joe Pettigrew said. "But I'll tell you. Down the end of the street there's a Tudor court called the Lexington Towers. Full of bit players and extras and so on. When they're not working, which is most of the time, and when they're not hitting the sixty-five per cent neutral spirits, which is hardly any of the time, a sniff of what you have there might be right down the middle for them. If you can collect for it, that is. And that's a point you want to watch."

"Professor Bingo's snuff," the Professor said with icy dignity, "is not cocaine." He folded his cloak around him with a gesture and touched the brim of his hat. He was still holding the small box in his left hand as he turned away.

"Cocaine, my friend?" he said. "Bah! Compared with Bingo's snuff, cocaine is baby powder."

Joe Pettigrew watched him move down the concrete walk and turn along the sidewalk. Old streets have old trees along them. Lexington Avenue was lined with camphor trees. They had their new coats of leaves and the leaves were still tinged with pink here and there. The Professor moved off under the trees. From the house the boom-boom still sounded. They would be on their third or fourth drink by now. They would be humming the music, cheek-to-cheek. After awhile they would start flopping around on the furniture. Mauling each other. Well, what difference did it make? He wondered what Gladys would be like when she was fifty-two years old. The way she was going now she wouldn't look like she sang in the choir.

He stopped thinking about this and watched Professor Bingo, who had now stopped under one of the camphor trees and turned to look back. He put his hand up to the

brim of his rusty topper and lifted the hat clear off his head and bowed. Joe Pettigrew waved at him politely. The Professor put the hat back on and very slowly, so that Joe Pettigrew could see exactly what he was doing, he took a pinch of powder from the still-open small round box and pushed it against his nostrils. Joe Pettigrew could almost hear him sniff it up with that long indrawn breath snuff takers use in order to get the stuff high up on the membranes.

He didn't actually hear this, of course, he just imagined it. But he saw it clearly enough. The hat, the opera cloak, the long thin legs, the white indoor face, the deep dark eyes, the arm raised, the round box in the left hand. He couldn't have been more than fifty feet away at most. Right in front of the fourth camphor tree from the foot of the walk.

But that couldn't have been right because if he had been standing in front of the tree Joe Pettigrew wouldn't have been able to see the entire trunk of the tree, the grass, the edge of the curbing, the street. Some of this would have been hidden behind the lean, fantastic body of Professor Bingo. Only it wasn't. Because Professor Augustus Bingo wasn't there any more. Nobody was there. Nobody at all.

Joe Pettigrew put his head on one side, staring down the street. He stood very still. He hardly heard the radio inside the house. A car turned the corner and went by along the block. Dust rose behind it. The leaves of the trees didn't quite rustle but they made a faint, barely audible sound. Then something else rustled.

Slow steps were coming towards Joe Pettigrew. No sound of heels. Just shoe leather slithering along the concrete of the walk. The muscles in the back of his neck began to ache. He could feel his teeth biting hard together. The steps came on slowly. They came very close. Then there was a moment of complete silence. Then the rustling steps moved away from Joe Pettigrew again. And the voice of Professor Bingo said out of nowhere:

"A free sample with my compliments, Mr. Pettigrew. But, of course, I shall be available for further supplies on a more professional basis."

The steps rustled again, going away. In a little while Joe Pettigrew didn't hear them at all. Exactly why he looked down at the top of the steps he was not quite clear; but he did. And there, where no hand had put it, beside the toe of his right shoe, was a small round box like a typewriter ribbon box. On the cover of it was written in ink, in a clear Spencerian hand, "Professor Bingo's Snuff."

Very slowly, like a man very

old or in a dream, Joe Pettigrew leaned down and picked up the box, covered it with his hand and put it in his pocket.

Boom, boom. Boom, boom, boom, went the radio. Gladys and Porter Green were not paying any attention to it. They were locked in each other's arms in a corner of the davenport, lips on lips. With a long sigh, Gladys opened her eyes and looked across the room. Then she stiffened and jerked away. Very slowly the door of the room was opening.

"What's the matter, baby?"

"The door. What's he up to now?"

Porter Green turned his head. The door was wide open now. But nobody stood in it. "O.K., the door's open," he said a little thickly. "So what?"

"It's Joe."

"It's Joe and still so what," Porter Green said irritably.

"He's hiding out there. He's up to something."

"Phooey," Porter Green said. He stood up and walked across the room. He put his head out into the hall. "Nobody here," he said over his shoulder. "Must have been the draft."

"There isn't any draft," Gladys said. Porter Green shut the door, felt that it was firmly closed, shook it. It was closed all right. He started back across the room. When he was half way to the davenport the door clicked behind him and slowly swung open again. Shrilly, against the heavy beat of the radio, Gladys yelled.

Porter Green lunged across and snapped off the radio, then turned angrily.

"Don't go loopy on me," he said between his teeth. "I don't like loopy dames."

Gladys just sat there with her mouth open, staring at the open door. Porter Green went across to it and stepped out into the hall. There was nobody there. There was no sound. For a long moment the house was perfectly still.

Then, upstairs from the back of the house, somebody began to whistle.

When Porter Green again shut the door he fixed it so that it was not on the latch. He would have been wiser to turn the knob of the bolt as well. He might just possibly have saved a lot of trouble. But he was not a very sensitive man and he had other things on his mind.

It might not have made any difference anyway. . . .

III

There were things to think about carefully. The noise — but that could be blanketed by turning up the radio. Wouldn't have to turn it up much either. Maybe not at all. Darn near shook the floor the way it was. Joe Pettigrew

sneered at his reflection in the bathroom mirror.

"You and me spend such a lot of time together," he said to his reflection. "We're such little pals. From now on you ought to have a name. I'll call you Joseph."

"Don't go whimsical on me," Joseph said. "I don't go for the light touch. I'm the moody type."

"I need your advice," Joe said. "Not that it ever was worth anything. I'm serious enough. Take the question of the snuff the Professor gave me. It works. Gladys and her boy friend didn't see me. Twice I stood right in the open door and they looked straight at me. They didn't see a thing. That's why she yelled. Seeing me wouldn't have scared her worth a nickel."

"It would have made her laugh," Joseph said.

But I can see you, Joseph. And you can see me. So suppose the effect of the snuff wears off after awhile? It's got to, because otherwise how would the Professor make any money? So I need to know how long."

"You'll know all right," Joseph said, "if anyone is looking your way when it wears off."

"That," Joe Pettigrew said, "could be very inconvenient, if you know what I'm thinking."

Joseph nodded. He knew that all right. "Maybe it doesn't wear off," he suggested. "Maybe the Professor has another powder that cancels this one out. Maybe that's the hook. He gives you what takes you out but when you want back in again you have to see him with folding money."

Joe Pettigrew thought about it, but he said no, he didn't think that could be right, because the Professor's card gave an address on Wilcox which would be in an office building. It would have elevators, and if the Professor was waiting around for customers that nobody could see, but that presumably they could feel if they touched them — well, having his place of business in an office building wouldn't be practical unless the effect did wear off.

"All right," Joseph said a little sourly. "I won't be stubborn."

"The next point," Joe Pettigrew said, "is where this being invisible leaves off. What I mean is, Gladys and Porter Green can't see me. Therefore they can't see the clothes I'm wearing because an empty suit of clothes standing in the doorway would scare them a lot worse than nothing standing there. But there's got to be some kind of system to it. Is it anything I touch?"

"That could be it," Joseph said. "Why not? Anything you touch fades out just the same as you do."

"But I touched the door," Joe said. "And I don't think that faded out. And I don't touch — I mean, actually touch — all of

my clothes. My feet touch my socks and my socks touch my shoes. I touch my shirt and I don't touch my jacket. And what about the things in pockets?"

"Maybe it's your aura," Joseph said. "Or your magnetic field or just your personality — what there is of it — anything that falls in that field goes with you. Cigarettes, money, anything that's properly yours, but not things like doors and walls and floors."

"I don't think that's very logical," Joe Pettigrew said severely.

"Would a logical guy be where you are?" Joseph inquired coldly. "Would that screwy Professor want to do business with a logical guy? What's logical about any part of this deal? He picks a complete stranger, a guy he never saw or heard of before, and gives him a batch of that stuff for free, and the guy he gives it to is maybe the one guy in the whole block that has a good quick use for it. Is any of that logical? In a pig's eye it's logical."

"So that," Joe Pettigrew said slowly, "brings me to what I'll be taking downstairs with me. They won't see that either. Chances are they won't even hear it."

"Of course you could try out with a highball glass," Joseph said. "You could pick one up just as somebody started to reach for it. You'd know quick enough whether it disappeared when you touched it."

"I could do that," Joe Pettigrew said. He paused and looked very thoughtful. "I wonder if you come back gradually," he added, "or all of a sudden. Bang."

"I vote for bang," Joseph said. "The old gentleman doesn't call himself Bingo for nothing. I say it's fast both ways — out and in. The thing you have to find out is when."

"I'll do that," Joe Pettigrew said. "I'll be very careful about it. It's important." He nodded at his reflection and Joseph nodded back. As he moved to turn away he added:

"I'm just a little sorry for Porter Green. All the time and money he's spent on her. And if I know a club chair from a catcher's mitt, all he's got out of it is a tease."

"That's something you can't be sure about," Joseph said. "He looks to me like a type that gets what he pays for or else."

That ended that. Joe Pettigrew went into the bedroom and got an old suitcase off a closet shelf. Inside was a scuffed briefcase with a broken strap. He unlocked it with a small key. There was a hard bundle in the briefcase, wrapped in a flannel duster. Inside the duster was an old woolen sock. And inside the sock, well oiled and clean, was a loaded .32 caliber automatic. Joe Pettigrew put this in his right hip pocket,

where it felt heavier than sin. He replaced the briefcase in the closet and went downstairs, walking softly and stepping on the treads towards the side. Then he thought that was silly because if they creaked nobody could hear such a small sound with the radio going.

He reached the bottom of the stairs and moved across to the door of the living room. He tried the knob gently. The door was locked. It was a spring lock which had been put on when most of the lower floor had been converted into a bachelor apartment for renting purposes. Joe got his key-holder out and pushed a key slowly into the lock. He turned it. He could feel the bolt coming back. The deadlatch wasn't on. Why should it be? You only do that at night, when you're the nervous type. He held the door knob with his left hand and gently eased the door open enough for the lock to clear. This was the tricky bit — one of the tricky bits. When the bolt was clear he let the knob return to its original position and withdrew the key. Holding the knob tightly he pushed the door open until he could look around it. There was no sound from inside except the booming radio. Nobody yelled. Therefore nobody was looking at the door. So far, so good.

Joe Pettigrew put his head around the door and looked in. The room was warm and smelled of cigarette smoke and humanity and ever so lightly of liquor. But there was nobody in it. Joe pushed the door wide open and stepped inside, a frown of disappointment on his face. Then the frown of disappointment changed to a grimace of disgust.

At the back of the living room, sliding doors had once given onto the dining room. The dining room was now a bedroom, but the sliding doors had been left much as they had always been. Now they were closed tight together. Joe Pettigrew stood quite motionless, staring at the sliding doors. His hand went up aimlessly and smoothed his thinning hair back. His face was completely expressionless for a long moment, then a faint smile that might have meant anything lifted the corners of his mouth. He turned back and closed the door. He moved across to the davenport and looked down at half-melted ice in the bottoms of two tall striped glasses, and the ice cubes swimming in water in a glass bowl beside the uncorked whiskey bottle, at the smeared cigarette stubs in a tray, one of them still wisping a tiny thread of smoke into the still air.

Joe sat down quietly on the corner of the davenport and looked at his watch. It seemed like a long, long time since he had made the acquaintance of Professor Bingo. A long, long time and a world

away. Now if he could only remember at exactly what time he had taken the pinch of snuff. It would be about ten twenty, he thought. It would be better to be sure, better to wait, better to experiment. Much better. But when had he ever done the better thing?

Not ever that he could recall. And certainly not since he had met Gladys.

He took the automatic out of his hip pocket and laid it down on the cocktail table in front of him. He sat looking at it absently, listening to the growl of the radio. Then he reached down and almost daintily he released the safety catch. That done he leaned back again and waited. And as he waited, with no particular emotion his mind remembered. It was the sort of thing many minds have had to remember. Behind the closed double doors he half-heard a series of noises which never quite registered on his mind, partly because of the radio and partly because of the intensity of his remembering . . .

IV

When the sliding doors began to open Joe Pettigrew reached his hand out and took the gun off the cocktail table. He rested it on his knee. That was the only movement he made. He didn't even look at the doors.

When the doors were open enough for a man's body to pass through, Porter Green's body appeared in the opening. His hands held on to the doors high up, the fingers glistening with strain. He swayed a little holding on to the doors like a man very drunk. But he was not drunk. His eyes were wide open in a fixed stare and his mouth had the beginnings of a silly grin on it. Sweat glistened on his face and on his puffy white belly. He was naked except for a pair of slacks. His feet were bare, his head was dank with sweat and tousled. On his face was something else that Joe Pettigrew didn't see because Joe Pettigrew kept on staring at the carpet between his feet, holding the gun on his knee, sideways, pointing at nothing.

Porter Green took a deep hard breath and let it out in a long sigh. He let go of the doors and took a couple of ragged steps forward into the room. His eyes came around to the whiskey bottle on the table in front of the davenport, in front of Joe Pettigrew. They focused on the bottle and his body turned a little and he leaned towards it even before he was near enough to reach it. The bottle rattled on the glass top of the cocktail table. Even then Joe Pettigrew didn't look up. He smelled the man so near him, so unaware of him, and his gaunt face twisted suddenly with pain.

The bottle went up, the hand

with the fine black hairs on the back of it disappeared from Joe Pettigrew's field of vision. The gurgling of the liquid was audible even against the radio.

"Bitch!" Porter Green said harshly between his teeth. "God damn rotten lousy filthy bitch." There was a puking horror and disgust in his voice.

Joe Pettigrew moved his head slightly and tensed. There was just room for him to stand up between the davenport and the cocktail table without squirming around. He stood up. The gun came up in his hand. As it came up, his eyes came with it slowly, slowly. He saw the naked soft flesh above the waistband of Porter Green's slacks. He saw the sweat glistening on the bulge above his navel. His eyes moved to the right and crawled up the ribs. His hand steadied. The heart is higher up than most people think it is. Joe Pettigrew knew that. The muzzle of the automatic knew it also. The muzzle pointed straight at that heart and with a steady squeeze that was almost indifferent Joe Pettigrew pulled the trigger.

It was louder than the radio and a different kind of sound. There was a feeling of concussion about it, a hint of power. If you haven't fired a gun for a long time that always takes you by surprise — the sudden pulsing life in the instrument of death, the swift way it moves in your hand like a lizard on a rock.

Shot men fall in all sorts of ways. Porter Green fell sideways, one knee giving way before the other. He fell with a boneless leisure, as if his knees were hinged in all directions. In the second it took him to fall Joe Pettigrew remembered a vaudeville act he had seen long ago when he was in show business himself. An act with a tall thin boneless man and a girl. In the middle of their foolishness the tall man would start to fall sideways very slowly, his body curving like a hoop so that at no moment could you say he hit the floor of the stage. He seemed to melt into it without effort or shock. He did this six times. The first time it was just funny, the second time it was exciting to watch him do it and wonder how he did it. The fourth time women in the audience began to scream: "Don't let him do it! Don't let him do it!" He did it. And by the end of the act he had all the impressionable people in rags, dreading what he was going to do, becaused it was inhuman and unnatural, and no man built along the usual lines could possibly have done it.

Joe Pettigrew stopped remembering this and came back to where he was, and there was Porter Green lying on the floor with his head against the carpet and nc blood at all, and for the first time

Joe Pettigrew looked at his face and saw that it was ripped and torn with deep scratches from a woman's long sharp frantic fingernails. That did it. Joe Pettigrew opened his mouth and screamed like a gored horse. . . .

V

In his own ears the scream sounded far off, like something in another house. A thin tearing sound that had nothing to do with him. Perhaps he hadn't screamed at all. It might have been tires taking a corner too fast. Or a lost soul on its headlong rush down to hell. He had no physical sensation at all. He seemed to float around the end of the table and around the cadaver of Porter Green. But his floating, or whatever it was, had a purpose. He was at the door now. He turned the dead latch. He was at the windows. They were closed, but one was not locked; he locked it. He was at the radio. He twisted that off. No more boom-boom. A silence like interstellar space swathed him in a long white shroud. He moved back across the room to the sliding doors.

He moved through them into Porter Green's bedroom which had been the dining room of the house long ago, when Los Angeles was young and hot and dry and dusty and still belonged to the desert and the rustling lines of eucalyptus trees and the fat palm trees that lined its streets.

All that remained of the dining room was a built-in china closet between the two north windows. There were books behind its fretted doors. Not many books. Porter Green wasn't what you would call a reading man. The bed was against the east wall, beyond which was the breakfast room and kitchen. It was very untidy, the bed was, and there was something on it, but Joe Pettigrew wasn't in the mood to look at what was on it. Beyond the bed was what had been a swing door but that had been changed for a solid door; that fitted tightly in its frame and had a turn-bolt on it. The bolt was shot. Joe Pettigrew thought he could see dust in the cracks of the door. He knew it was seldom opened. But the bolt was shot, that was the important thing. He passed on into a short hall that passed across the main hall under the stairs. This had been necessary to give access to the bathroom, once a sewing room, on the other side of the house. There was a closet under the stairs. Joe Pettigrew opened the door and switched on the light. A couple of suitcases in the corners, suits on hangers, an overcoat and a raincoat. A pair of dingy-white buck shoes tossed in the corner. He switched the light off again and closed the door. He went on into the bathroom. It was pretty large for a bathroom and the tub was old-fashioned. Joe

Pettigrew passed the mirror over the wash basin without looking into it. He didn't feel like talking to Joseph just now. Detail, that was the main thing, careful attention to detail. The bathroom windows were open and the gauze curtains fluttered. He shut them tight and turned the catches in the side of the frame. There was no door out of the bathroom except the one by which he had entered. There had been one towards the front of the house, but it had been filled in and papered over with waterproof paper, like the rest of the wall. The room in front was practically a junk room. It had some old furniture and stuff and a roll-top desk in that hideous light oak people used to like. Joe Pettigrew never used it, never went in there at all. So that was that.

He turned back and stopped in front of the bathroom mirror. He didn't want to at all. But Joseph might have thought of something he ought to know, so he looked at Joseph. Joseph looked back at him with an unpleasant fixed stare.

"Radio," Joseph said curtly. "You turned it off. Wrong. Turn it down, yes. Off, no."

"Oh," Joe Pettigrew said to Joseph. "Yes, I guess you're right. Then there's the gun. But I hadn't forgotten that." He patted his pocket.

"And the bedroom windows," Joseph said, almost contemptuous. "And you're going to have to look at Gladys."

"The bedroom windows, check," Joe Pettigrew said and paused. "I don't want to look at her. She's dead. She's got to be dead. All you had to do was see him."

"Teased the wrong guy this time, didn't she?" Joseph said coldly. "Or were you expecting something like that?"

"I don't know," Joe said. "No, I don't think I went that far. But I messed it up good. I didn't have to shoot him at all."

Joseph looked at him with a peculiar expression. "And waste the Professor's time and material? You don't think he came by here just for the exercise, do you?"

"Goodbye, Joseph," Joe Pettigrew said.

"What for are you saying goodbye?" Joseph snapped.

"I have a feeling that way," Joe Pettigrew replied. He went out of the bathroom.

He went around the bed and closed and locked the windows. He did finally look at Gladys, although he didn't want to. He needn't have. His hunch had been right. If ever a bed looked like a battlefield this was it. If ever a face looked livid and twisted and dead, it was the face of Gladys. There were a few shreds of clothing on her, that's all. Just a few shreds. She looked battered. She

looked awful.

Joe Pettigrew's diaphragm convulsed and his mouth tasted bile. He went out of there quickly and leaned against the doors on the other side, but was careful not to touch them with his hands.

"Radio on but not loud," he said in the silence, when he had his stomach back in place. "Gun in his hand. I'm not going to like doing that." His eyes went towards the outer door. "I'd better use the upstairs phone. Plenty of time to come back."

He let out a slow sigh and went about it. But when it came time to fix the gun in Porter Green's hand he found he couldn't look at Porter Green's face. He had a feeling, a certainty that Porter Green's eyes were open and looking at him, but he couldn't meet them, even dead. He felt that Porter Green would forgive him and hadn't really minded being shot. It was quick and probably much less unpleasant than what he had coming in the legal way.

It wasn't that which made him ashamed. And he wasn't ashamed because Porter Green had taken Gladys from him, for that would be silly. Porter Green hadn't done anything that hadn't been done already, years ago. He guessed maybe it was the awful bloody-looking scratches that made him ashamed. Up to then Porter Green had at least looked like a man. The scratches somehow or other made a damn fool out of him. Even dead. A man who looked and acted like Porter Green, who had been around as much as he must have been, known women too often and too well, and all the rest of it — a man like that ought to be above getting into a cat fight with a slut like Gladys, an empty paper bag of a woman who had nothing to give any man.

Joe Pettigrew didn't think very highly of himself as a dominating male. But at least he had never had his face clawed.

He arranged the gun very neatly in Porter Green's hand, without once looking at his face. A shade too neatly, perhaps. With the same neatness and with no undue haste he arranged what other matters required to be arranged . . .

VI

The black-and-white radio car turned the corner and coasted down the block. There was no fuss or urgency about it. It stopped quietly in front of the house and for a moment both the uniformed officers looked up at the deep porch and the closed door and windows without saying anything, hearing the steady stream of talk from the squawk box and sorting it out in their minds without conscientiously paying any attention to it.

The one nearest the curb said: "I don't hear anybody screaming

and I don't see any neighbors out front. Looks like somebody shot a blank."

The policeman behind the wheel nodded and said absently: "Better ring the bell anyway." He made a note of the time on his report sheet, reported the car out of service to the dispatcher. The one next to the curb got out and went up the concrete walk and onto the porch. He rang the bell. He could hear it ring somewhere in the house. He could also hear a radio or record player going quietly but distinctly to his left in the room with the closed windows. He rang again. No answer. He walked along the porch and tapped on the window glass above the screen. Then harder. The music went on but that was all. He went down off the porch and around the side of the house to the back door. The screen was hooked, the door inside shut. There was another bell here. He rang that. It buzzed close to him, quite loud, but no one answered it. He banged hard on the screen and then gave it a yank. The hook held. He went around the house the other way. The windows on the north side were too high to look into from the ground. He reached the front lawn and walked diagonally back across the lawn to the radio car. It was a well-kept lawn and had been watered the night before. At one point he looked back to see if his heels had marked it. They hadn't. He was glad they hadn't. He was just a young policeman and not tough at all.

"No answer, but there's music going," he told his partner, leaning into the car.

The driver listened to the squawk box a moment and then got out of the car. "You take that side," he answered, pointing south with his thumb. "I'll try the other house. Maybe the neighbors heard something."

"Couldn't have been much or they'd be breathing down our necks by now," the first policeman said.

"Better ask just the same."

An elderly man was cultivating with a one-prong cultivator around some rose bushes behind the house south of the Pettigrew house. The young cop asked him what he knew to cause a police call about next door. Nothing. See the people go out? No, he hadn't noticed anyone leave. Pettigrews had no car. Roomer had a car, but garage looked locked. You could see the padlock. What kind of people? Ordinary. Never bothered anybody. Radio seemed a bit loud lately? Like now? The old man shook his head. Wasn't loud now. Had been earlier. What time they turn it down? He didn't know. Heck, why would he? An hour, half an hour. Nothing been happening around here, officer. I been out pottering all morning. Somebody called in, the officer said.

Must be a mistake, the old man said. Anybody else in his house? His house? The old man shook his head. Nope, not now. The wife had gone to the beauty parlor. She went for that purple stuff they were putting on white hair nowadays. He chuckled. The young cop hadn't thought he had a chuckle in him, the way he kept pecking at those roses, kind of short and cross.

On the other side of the Pettigrew house, where the driver of the radio car went, nobody answered the front door. The policeman went around back and saw a child of indeterminate age and sex trying to kick the slats out of a play pen. The child needed its nose wiped and looked as if it preferred it that way. The officer banged at the back door and got a lank-haired slattern of a woman. When she opened the door some damn-fool soap opera poured out of the kitchen and he could see that she was listening to it with the passionate attention of an engineer squad clearing a mine field. She hadn't heard a darn thing, she screamed at him, timing her answer neatly between two lines of dopey dialogue. She didn't have no time to bother with what went on anywheres else. Radio next door? Yes, she guessed they had one. Might have heard it once in a while. Could she turn that thing down a little, the cop asked her, scowling at the table radio on the kitchen sink. She said she could, but didn't aim to. A thin dark girl with hair as lank as her mother's appeared suddenly from nowhere and stood about six inches from the officer's stomach and stared up his shirt front at him. He moved back and she stayed right with him. He decided he was going to get mad in a minute. Didn't hear anything at all, huh? he yelled at the woman. She held up her hand for silence, listened to a brief interchange of sparkling slop from the radio, and then shook her head. She started to close the door before he was half through it. The little girl speeded him on his way with a short, sharp, and efficient raspberry.

His face felt a little hot when he met the other policeman beside the radio car. They both looked across the street, and then looked at each other and shrugged. The driver started around the back of the car to get back in, then changed his mind and went back up the walk to the front porch of Pettigrew's house. He listened to the radio and noted that there was lamplight around the blinds. He stopped and angled himself from window to window until he found a small chink he could see through.

After straining this way and that, he finally saw what looked like a man's body lying on its back on the floor beside the leg of a low table. He straightened and made

illustrator: L. R. Summers

a sharp gesture to the other cop. The other came running.

"We go in," the driver said. "You don't see so good this shift. There's a guy in there and he ain't dancing. Radio on, lights on, all doors and windows locked, nobody answers the door, and a guy is lying on the carpet. Don't that add to anything in your book?"

It was at that moment that Joe Pettigrew took his second pinch of Professor Bingo's snuff. . . .

They got into the kitchen by forcing a window up with a screwdriver, without breaking the glass. The old man next door saw them and went right on pecking at his roses. It was a clean neat kitchen, because Joe Pettigrew kept it that way. Being in the kitchen they found they could as easily have stayed outside. There was no possible way into the lighted front room without breaking down a door. Which finally brought them back to the front porch. The driver of the radio car cracked a window with the heavy screwdriver, unlatched it, pulled it up far enough to lean in and knock the screen hook loose with the end of the screwdriver. They got both sashes of the window up and so got into the room without touching anything with their hands except the window catch.

The room was warm and oppressive. With a brief glance at Porter Green the driver went towards the bedroom, unbuttoning the flap of his holster as he went.

"Better put your hands in your pockets," he told the young policeman over his shoulder. "Could be this isn't your day." He said it without sarcasm or anything in his voice but the meaning of the words, but the young officer flushed just the same and bit his lip. He stood looking down at Porter Green. He had no need to touch him or even bend down. He had seen far more dead men than his partner. He stood perfectly still because he knew there was nothing for him to do and that anything he did, even walking around on the carpet, might happen to spoil something the lab boys could use.

Standing there quietly, and even with the radio still going in the corner, he seemed to hear a sound like a faint clink and then the rustle of a step outside on the porch. He turned swiftly and went to the window. He pushed the glass curtain aside and looked out.

No. Nothing. He looked faintly puzzled because he had very keen hearing. Then he looked disgusted.

"Watch yourself, kid," he told himself. "No Japs near this foxhole."

VII

You could stand in a recessed doorway and take a wallet out of your pocket and a card from the

wallet and read it and nobody could see the wallet or the card or the hand holding it. People passed up and down the street idly or busily, the usual early afternoon mob, and nobody even glanced toward you. If they did, all they would see would be an empty doorway. In other circumstances it might have been amusing. It wasn't amusing now, for obvious reasons. Joe Pettigrew's feet were tired. He hadn't done so much walking in ten years. He pretty well had to walk. He couldn't very well have got Porter Green's car out. The sight of a perfectly empty car driving along in traffic would be apt to unhinge the traffic police. Somebody would start yelling.

He might have risked crowding on to a bus or street car in a group of people. It looked feasible. They probably wouldn't look around to see who was jostling them but there was always the chance that some big strong character might make a grab at nothing and get hold of an arm and be just stubborn enough to hang on even if he couldn't see what it was he was hanging on to. No; much better to walk. Joseph would certainly approve of that.

"Wouldn't you, Joseph?" he asked, looking into the dusty glass of the doorway behind him.

Joseph didn't say. He was there all right, but he wasn't sharp and well-defined. He was foggy. He didn't have the clean-cut personality you expected from Joseph.

"All right, Joseph. Some other time." Joe Pettigrew looked down at the card he was still holding. He would be about eight blocks to the building where, in Room 311, Professor Augustus Bingo maintained an office. There was a telephone number too. Joe Pettigrew wondered if it would be wiser to make an appointment. Yes, it would be wiser. There was probably an elevator and once in that he would be too much at the mercy of chance. A lot of these old buildings — and he knew Professor Bingo would be almost certain to have his office in a building that went with his rusty old hat — didn't have any fire stairs. They had outside fire escapes and a freight elevator you couldn't get to from the lobby. Much better to make an appointment. There was also the question of payment. Joe Pettigrew had thirty-seven dollars in his wallet, but he didn't suppose that thirty-seven dollars would cause Professor Bingo's heart to bulge with excitement. Professor Bingo undoubtedly selected his prospects with care and would be apt to demand a large slice of their available funds. This was not easy to manage. You could hardly cash a check if nobody could see the check. Even if the teller could see the check, which Joe Pettigrew supposed would be possible if he put it down

on the counter and took his hand away — after all there would *be* a check — the teller would hardly hold the money out to empty space. The bank was out. Of course, he might wait around for someone else to cash a check and then grab the money. But a bank was a bad place for that kind of operation. The person grabbed from would probably make a great deal of fuss and noise and Joe Pettigrew knew that the first thing a bank did in a case like that was block the doors and ring an alarm bell. It would be better to let the person with the money leave the bank first. But this had disadvantages. If it was a man, he would put the money where it would be difficult for an inexperienced pickpocket to lift it, even if he had a certain technical advantage over the most experienced pickpocket. It would have to be a woman. But women very seldom cashed large checks and Joe Pettigrew had scruples about snatching a woman's bag. Even if she could spare the money, the loss of her bag would make her so helpless.

"I'm not the right type," Joe Pettigrew said more or less out loud, still standing in the doorway, "to really get the value out of a situation like this."

That was the truth and the whole trouble. In spite of having put a neat slug into Porter Green, Joe Pettigrew was fundamentally a decent man. He had been a little carried away at first, but he could see now that being invisible had its drawbacks. Well, perhaps he didn't need any more snuff. There was a way to find out. But if he did need it, he would need it awfully fast.

There was nothing sensible except to telephone Professor Bingo and make an appointment.

He left the doorway and edged along the outside of the sidewalk to the next intersection. There was a dim-looking bar across the way. It might well have a secluded telephone booth. Of course, even a secluded telephone booth could be a rat trap now. Suppose somebody came along and saw it was apparently empty and came in — no, better not think of that.

He went into the bar. It was secluded enough. There were two men on the stools and a couple in a booth. It was that time of day when almost no one drinks except a few loafers and alcoholics and an occasional pair of clandestine lovers. The pair in the booth looked like that. They were very close together and had eyes for themselves and no one else. The woman had an awful hat and a dirty-white baby-lamb jacket, and she looked puffy and spoiled. The man looked a bit like Porter Green. He had that same sharp, competent, unscrupulous air. Joe Pettigrew stopped beside the booth and looked down at them with

distaste. There was a pony of whiskey in front of the man with a chaser beside it. The woman had some godawful mess in layers of different colors. Joe Pettigrew looked down at the whiskey.

It probably wasn't wise, but he felt like it. He reached quickly for the small glass and poured the whiskey down his throat. It had an awful taste. He choked violently. The man in the booth straightened up and swung his head around. He stared straight at Joe Pettigrew.

"What the hell —" he said sharply.

Joe Pettigrew was frozen. He stood there holding the glass and the man looked him straight in the eye. The man's eye went down, down to the empty glass Joe Pettigrew was holding. The man put his hands on the edge of the table and started to move sideways. He didn't say another word, but Joe Pettigrew didn't have to be told. He turned and ran towards the back of the bar. The bartender and the two men on the stools both turned to look. The man from the booth was standing up now.

Just in time Joe Pettigrew found it. It said *Men* on the door. He went in quickly and swung around. There was no lock on the door. His hand gripped frantically for the box in his pocket and he was only just getting it out when the door started to open. He stepped behind it and wrenched the lid off the box and grabbed a big pinch. He got it to his nose a mere second before the man in the booth was in the Men's Room with him.

Joe Pettigrew's hand shook so violently that he dropped half the snuff on the floor. He also dropped the cover of the box. With a diabolical precision the cover rolled straight along the concrete floor and came to rest practically touching the tip of the right shoe of the man from the booth.

The man stood inside the door and looked around. He really looked around. And he looked straight at Joe Pettigrew. But his expression was quite different this time. He looked away. He stepped across to the two stalls. He pushed first one door open, then another. Both stalls were empty. The man stood there looking into them. A peculiar sound came from his throat. With an absent gesture he got out a pack of cigarettes and stuck a cigarette in his mouth. A neat small silver lighter came out next and snapped a neat small flame to the cigarette.

The man blew a long plume of smoke. He turned slowly and moved towards the door like a man in a dream. He went out. Then with appalling suddenness he came back in again hurling the door in front of him. Joe Pettigrew got out of the way just in time. The man gave the room

another raking glance. Here was a badly puzzled man, Joe Pettigrew thought. A very annoyed man, a man into whose afternoon a large drop of gall had been dropped. The man went out again.

Joe Pettigrew moved once more. There was a frosted window in the wall, small, but adequate. He unlatched it and tried to push it up. It stuck. He tried harder. The wrench of the effort hurt his back. The window came free at last and slid up jerkily as far as it would go.

As he dropped his hands and wiped them on his pants a voice behind him said: "That wasn't open."

Another voice said: "What wasn't open, Mister?"

"The window, chump."

Joe looked around carefully. He sidled away from the window. The barkeep and the man from the booth were both looking at the window.

"Must of been," the barkeep said tersely. "And skip the chump."

"I say it wasn't." The man from the booth was more than emphatic, and less than polite.

"You callin' me a liar?" the barkeep inquired.

"How would you know whether it was open?" The man from the booth started to get aggressive again.

"Why you come back in here, if you was so sure?"

"Because I couldn't believe my eyes," the man from the booth almost yelled.

The barkeep grinned. "But you expect me to believe 'em. That the picture?"

"Oh, go to hell," the man from the booth said. He turned and banged out of the Men's Room. In so doing he stepped square on the top of Professor Bingo's snuff box. It crunched flat under his shoe. Nobody looked at it, except Joe Pettigrew. He looked at it all right.

The barkeep went across to the window and shut it and turned the catch.

"That takes care of that jerk," he said, and went on out. Joe Pettigrew moved carefully to the crushed box-top and stooped for it. He straightened it out as best he could and put it back on the bottom half. It didn't look very safe any more. He wrapped it in a paper towel just to be a little safer.

Another man came into the Men's Room, but he was on business. Joe Pettigrew caught the door as it swung shut and slipped out. The barkeep was behind the bar again. The man from the booth and the woman with the dirty-white lambs-wool were starting out.

"Come again soon," the barkeep said, in a voice that meant exactly the opposite. The man from the booth almost stopped but the woman said something to

him and they went on out.

"What's the beef?" the man on the stool asked, the one who had not gone to the Men's Room.

"I could pick a better looking skirt than that over on North Broadway at one in the a.m.," the barkeep said contemptuously. "The guy not only ain't got no manners and no brains, he ain't got no taste."

"But we know what he has got," the man on the stool said laconically, as Joe Pettigrew went quietly out of the door.

VIII

The bus station on Cahuenga was the place. People coming and going all the time, people intent on one thing, people who would never look to see who jostled them, people with no time to think and most of them nothing to think with if they had the time. There was plenty of noise. Dialing in an empty phone booth would attract no attention. He reached up and loosened the bulb so the light would not go on when he closed the door. He was a little worried now. The snuff couldn't be trusted for much more than an hour. He figured back from the time he had left the young policeman in the living room at the house to when the man in the booth had looked up and seen him.

Just about an hour. This took thought. Much thought. He peered at the telephone number. Gladstone 7-4963. He dropped his nickel and dialed it. At first it didn't ring, then a wavy high pitched whine reached his ears, then a click, and then he heard his nickel drop down into the return slot. Then an operator's voice said: "What number are you calling, please?"

Joe Pettigrew told her. She said: "One moment, please." There was a pause. Joe Pettigrew kept looking out through the glass panel of the booth. He wondered how long it would be before somebody tried the door of the booth and how much longer before someone noticed what would seem to him or her a very curious position for the telephone receiver — at the ear of someone who wasn't there. He supposed it was that way. The whole damn telephone system could hardly disappear just because he was using one instrument.

The operator's voice came back, "I'm sorry, sir, but there is no such telephone number listed."

"There must be," Joe Pettigrew said violently, and repeated the number. The operator also repeated her remark, and added: "One moment, please, I will give you Information." The booth was hot and Joe Pettigrew was beginning to sweat. Information came and heard and went away and came back.

"I'm sorry, sir. There is no telephone listed under that name."

Joe Pettigrew stepped out of the booth just in time to avoid a woman with a string bag and an appearance of great hurry. He just slid away from her in time. He got out of there fast.

It could be an unlisted number. He should have thought of that long ago. The way Professor Bingo operated, he would certainly have an unlisted phone. Joe Pettigrew stopped dead and somebody kicked his heel. He skipped out of the way just in time.

No, he was being silly. He had dialed the number. And even if it was an unlisted number, the operator, knowing he had the number and that it was a correct number, would simply have told him to dial it again. She would think he had made a mistake in dialing. So Bingo had no telephone at all.

"All right," Joe Pettigrew said. "All right, Bingo. Maybe I'll just drop over and tell you about it. Maybe I won't need any money at all. A man your age ought to have more sense than to put a phony telephone number on a business card. How can you expect to sell the product if the customer can't get to talk to you?"

He said all this in his mind. Then he told himself he was probably doing Professor Bingo an injustice. The Professor looked like a pretty smooth operator. He would have a reason for what he did. Joe Pettigrew got the card out and looked at it again, 311 Blankey Building, on North Wilcox. Joe Pettigrew had never heard of the Blankey Building, but that didn't mean anything. Any big city is full of ratholes like that. It couldn't be more than half a mile. That would be about all there would be to the business part of Wilcox.

He walked south. The building had an even number which would put it on the east side. He ought to have asked the telephone operator to check the address when she couldn't find the name. Maybe she would and maybe she would tell him to go fishing.

He found the block easily enough and he found the number not quite so easily, but by a process of elimination. It wasn't called the Blankey Building, though. He read the card again and made sure. No, he hadn't made a mistake. That was the right address, but it wasn't an office building. Nor was it a private home, nor a store.

Quite a sense of humor, Professor Augustus Bingo had. His business address turned out to be the Hollywood Police Station.

IX

Besides the lab men and photographers and the fellow who did the block sketch to scale, showing the position of the furniture and windows and things, there was a

lieutenant of detectives and a sergeant. Being from the Hollywood division they both looked a bit more sporty than you expect plain clothes cops to look. One had his sport-shirt collar outside the collar of his shepherd's-plaid jacket. He wore sky-blue slacks and shoes with gilt buckles on them. His argyle socks gleamed in the darkness of the clothes closet that opened under the stairs between the bedroom and the bathroom. He had the square of carpet rolled back. Underneath was a trap door with a sunken ring in it. The man in the blue slacks — he happened to be the sergeant although he looked older than the lieutenant — pulled at the ring and got the trap door up against the back wall of the closet. The space down below was half-lit from the ventilating screens in the foundation walls. There was a rough wooden ladder leaning against the concrete wall of the basement. The sergeant, whose name was Rehder, got the ladder into position and back down far enough to see what was under the floor.

"Big place," he said speaking up. "Must have been stairs down here once before they floored the space in hardwood to make the closet. They put the trap in to get at the gas and water pipes and the outfall. Think it's worth looking in the trunks?"

The lieutenant was a big handsome man built like a blocking back. He had sad dark eyes. His name was Waldman. He nodded vaguely.

"There's the bottom of the floor furnace," Rehder said. He reached out and rapped on it. The sheet iron rang. "That's all the furnace there is. And that would be installed from the top. Anybody check the air vents?"

"Yes," Waldman said. "They're big enough all right, but three of them are nailed shut and painted over. The one in back of the house is loose but the gas meter is just inside it. Nobody could get past that."

Rehder came back up the ladder and lowered the trap to the closet floor. "Also there's this carpet," he said. "Pretty hard to get that to fall in place without a wrinkle."

He dusted his hands off on the piece of carpet and they went out of the closet and shut the door. They went into the living room and watched the lab men fussing around.

"Prints aren't going to mean anything," the lieutenant said, moving a finger along the edge of his chin against the dark close-shaven bristles. "Unless we happen to get a clear overlay. Or something on a door or window. Even that wouldn't be too conclusive. After all, Pettigrew lives here. It's his house."

"I'd sure like to know who reported that shot," Rehder said.

"Pettigrew. Who else?" Waldman kept on rubbing his chin. His eyes were sad and sleepy. "I can't go for suicide. I've seen too many and I never once saw one where a guy shot himself through the heart from a distance of not less than three feet and more likely four or five."

Rehder nodded. He was looking down at the floor furnace. It had a big grating partly in the floor, partly in the wall.

"But assume it *could* be suicide," Waldman went on. "The place is locked up tight — all except the window the prowl boys got in at, and one of them stayed right beside it until we got here. The door's not only locked but bolted with a deadlatch that is not connected with the lock. Every window is locked and the only other door, the one that connects with the breakfast room at the back of the house, has a deadlatch on this side which can't be opened from the breakfast room and a spring lock on the other side which can't be opened from in here. So the physical evidence proves Pettigrew couldn't have had access to these rooms when the shot was fired."

"So far," Rehder said.

"So far, sure. But somebody heard that shot and somebody reported it. None of the neighbors heard it."

"They say," Rehder put in.

"But why lie about it *after* we found the bodies? Before that maybe, just not to be involved. You could say whoever heard it doesn't want to be a witness at an inquest or a trial. Some people don't, sure. But they're likely to be bothered a lot more, if they didn't hear anything — or think they didn't — than if they did. The investigators are going to keep trying to make them remember something they think they've forgotten. You know how often that works out."

Rehder said: "Let's get back to Pettigrew." His eyes were on his partner now, very watchful and faintly triumphant, as if at some secret thought.

"We have to suspect him," Waldman said. "We always have to suspect the husband. He must have known wife was playing around with this Porter Green. Pettigrew's not out of town or anything. The mailman saw him this morning. He either left before or after the shot. If he left before, he's clear. If he left after, he still might not have heard it. But I'm saying he did because he had a better chance than anyone else. And if he did, what would he do?"

Rehder frowned. "They never do the obvious thing, do they? No. You'd say he'd try to get in, and he'd find out he couldn't without breaking in. Then he'd call the law. But this guy is living right in the house where his wife is play-

ing footie with the roomer. Either he's an awful cold fish and doesn't give a damn —"

"That's happened," Waldman put in.

"— or he'd be humiliated and pretty savage inside. When he hears that shot, he knows damn well he'd like to have fired it. And he knows we're likely to think the same. So he goes out and calls us from a pay station and then disappears. When he comes home he'll be the most surprised guy in the world."

Waldman nodded. "But still we get a chance to size him up, it doesn't mean a thing. It was pure chance nobody saw him leave, pure chance nobody else reported the shot. He couldn't rely on any of that, therefore he couldn't rely on pretending not to know. If it's suicide, I say he didn't hear the shot, and didn't call in. He left either before or after, and he doesn't know a thing about anybody being dead."

"So again it's not suicide," Rehder said. "So he had to get out of here and leave the place locked up. Fine. How did he do it?"

"Yes. How?"

"Floor furnace. It heats the hall too. Didn't you notice?" Rehder asked triumphantly.

Waldman's eyes went to the floor furnace and back to Rehder. "What size man is he?" he asked.

"One of the boys looked at his clothes upstairs. Five-ten, one-sixty, wears an eight-and-a-half shoe, a thirty-eight shirt, a thirty-nine suit. Just small enough. That piece behind the upright grating just hangs on a rod. We'll print it and then try it out."

"Not trying to make a chump out of me, are you, Max?"

"You know better than that, Lieutenant. If it's homicide, the guy had to get out of the room. There's no such thing as a locked room murder. Never has been."

Waldman sighed and looked towards the stain on the carpet by the corner of the cocktail table.

"I suppose not," he said. "But it does seem a pity we can't have just one."

X

At sixteen minutes to three Joe Pettigrew walked down a path in a quiet part of Hollywood Cemetery. Not that it wasn't all quiet. But here it was remote and forgotten. The grass was green and cool. There was a small stone bench. He sat down on it and looked across at a marble monument with angels on it. It looked expensive. He could see that the lettering had once been in gold. He read the name. It went back a long time, to a lost glamor, to the days when a star of the flickering screen lived like an Eastern caliph and died like a prince of the blood. It was a simple place for a

man who had once been so famous. Not much like that hoked-up demi-paradise over on the far side of the river.

A long time ago, in a lost and dingy world. Bathtub gin, gang wars, ten per cent margin accounts, parties where everyone got paralyzed as a matter of course. Cigar smoke in the theater. Everybody smoked cigars in those days. A heavy pall of it always hung over the mezzanine boxes. The draft sucked it across on to the stage. He could smell it as he teetered fifteen feet in the air on a bike with wheels like watermelons. Joe Meredith-Clown Cyclist. Good too. Never quite a headliner — you couldn't be with that kind of act — but a hell of a long way from the acrobats. A solo. One of the best falls in the business. Looks easy, doesn't it? Try it some time and find out how easy — fifteen feet and land on the back of your neck on a hard stage and roll gently to your feet with the hat still on your head and nine inches of lighted cigar stuck in the corner of a huge painted mouth.

He wondered what would happen if he tried it now. Probably break four ribs and get a punctured lung.

A man came along the path. One of these young hard-looking kids that go coatless in any kind of weather. About twenty or twenty-one, too much black hair not clean enough, narrow flat black eyes, dark olive skin, shirt open on a hard hairless chest.

He stopped in front of the bench and measured Joe Pettigrew with a quick sweep of the eyes.

"Got a match?"

Joe Pettigrew stood up. It was time to go home now. He took a paper match-folder out of his pocket and held it out.

"Thanks." The kid picked a loose cigarette out of his shirt pocket and lit the cigarette slowly, moving his eyes this way and that. As he handed the matches back with his left hand he looked over his shoulder, a quick glance. Joe Pettigrew reached for the matches. The kid dropped his right hand swiftly inside the shirt and jerked out a short gun.

"Now the wallet, chum, and take its ——"

Joe Pettigrew kicked him in the groin. The kid doubled over and began to sweat. Not a sound came from him. His hand still held the gun, but not pointed. Tough kid, all right. Joe Pettigrew took a step and kicked the gun out of his hand. He had it before the kid moved.

The kid was breathing in harsh gasps now. He looked pretty sick. Joe Pettigrew felt a little sad. He had the floor. He could say anything he liked. He had nothing to say. The world was full of tough kids. It was their world, the world of Porter Green.

Time to go home now. He walked away along the sunlit path and didn't look back. When he came to a neat green trash barrel he dropped the gun into it. He looked back then, but the kid was nowhere in sight. Probably walking fast to get away and groaning as he walked. Perhaps even running. Where do you run to when you have killed a man? Nowhere. You go home. Running away is a very complicated business. It takes thought and preparation. It takes time, money, and clothes.

His legs ached. He was tired. But he could buy coffee now and take the bus. He ought to have waited and thought it out. That was Professor Augustus Bingo's fault. He made it much too easy, like a short cut that wasn't on the map. You took it, and then you found that the short cut didn't go anywhere, just ended in a yard with a vicious dog. So, if you were very quick and very lucky, you kicked the vicious dog in the right place and went back the way you came.

His hand went into his pocket and his fingers touched the packet of Professor Bingo's product — a little crumpled and partly spilled, but still usable, if he could think of any use for it, which was now unlikely.

Too bad Professor Bingo didn't have a real address on his card. Joe Pettigrew would have liked to call on him and twist his neck. A fellow like that could do a lot of harm in the world. More harm than a hundred Porter Greens.

But a character as resourceful as Professor Bingo would know all that in advance. Even if he had an office, you wouldn't find him there unless he wanted you to.

Joe Pettigrew walked.

XI

Lieutenant Waldman saw him and knew him three houses away, long before he turned up the walk. He looked exactly like what Waldman had expected, gaunt face, neat gray suit, precise and exact way of moving. Right weight, height, and build.

"Okay," he said, standing up from a chair by the window. "Nothing rough, Max. Feel him out slow."

They had sent the police car off around the corner. The street was quiet again. Nothing looked sensational. Joe Pettigrew turned into the walk and came towards the porch. He stopped halfway, stepped over on the lawn, and got out a pocket knife. He bent down and cut a dandelion off just below the surface. He folded the knife carefully after wiping it off on the grass and put it back in his pocket. He threw the dandelion off towards the corner of the house out of sight of the men watching.

"I don't buy it," Rehder said in a harsh whisper. "It just ain't

possible that guy cooled anybody today."

"He sees the window," Waldman said, pulling back into shadow without moving too quickly. The lights were off in the room now and the radio had long since been stilled. Joe Pettigrew was looking up at the broken window right in front of him from where he stood on the lawn. He moved a little more quickly up on the porch and stopped. His hand went out and pulled at the screen enough to show that it was loose. He let go of the screen and straightened up. His face had an odd expression. Then he turned quickly towards the door.

The door opened as he reached it. Waldman stood inside looking out gravely.

"I think you would be Mr. Pettigrew," he said politely.

"Yes, I'm Pettigrew," the gaunt expressionless face told him. "Who are you?"

"A police officer, Mr. Pettigrew. The name is Waldman, Lieutenant Waldman. Come in, please."

"Police? Somebody break in here? The window —"

"No, it's not a burglary, Mr. Pettigrew. We'll explain it all to you." He stood back from the door and Joe Pettigrew stepped in past him. He took off his hat and hung it up, just as he always did.

Waldman stepped close to him and ran his hands rapidly over his body.

"Sorry, Mr. Pettigrew. Part of my job. This is Sergeant Rehder. We're from the Hollywood Division. Let's go into the living room."

"That's not our living room," Joe Pettigrew said. "This part of the house is rented."

"We know that, Mr. Pettigrew. Just sit down and take it easy."

Joe Pettigrew sat down and leaned back. His eyes searched the room. They saw the chalk marks and the dusting powder. He leaned forward again.

"What's that?" he asked sharply.

Waldman and Rehder looked at him with level unsmiling expressions. "What time did you go out today?" Waldman asked, and leaned back casually and lit a cigarette. Rehder sat hunched forward on the front half of a chair, his right hand loose on his knee. His gun was in a short leather holster inside his right hip pocket. He'd never liked an underarm clip. This guy Pettigrew didn't look like it would take a gun to knock him over, but you never know.

"What time? I don't remember. Somewhere around noon."

"To go where?"

"Just walking. I went over to Hollywood Cemetery for a while. My first wife is buried there."

"Oh, your first wife," Waldman said easily. "Any idea where

your present wife is?"

"Probably out with the roomer. Fellow named Porter Green," Joe Pettigrew said calmly.

"Like that, eh?" Waldman said.

"Just like that." Pettigrew's eyes went to the floor again, over where the chalk marks were and the dark stain in the carpet. "Suppose you men tell me —"

"In a moment," Waldman cut in, rather more sharply. "Did you have any reason to call the police? From here or while you were out?"

Joe Pettigrew shook his head. "As long as the neighbors didn't complain, why should I?"

"I don't get it," Rehder said. "What's he talking about?"

"Pretty noisy, were they?" Waldman asked. He got it all right.

Pettigrew nodded again. "But they had every one of the windows shut."

"And locked?" Waldman asked casually.

"When a cop starts being subtle," Joe Pettigrew answered just as casually, "it's for laughs. How would I know if the windows were locked?"

"I'll stop being subtle, if it bothers you, Mr. Pettigrew." Waldman had a sweet sad smile on his face now. "The windows *were* locked. That's why the radio officers had to break the glass to get in. Now ask me why they had to get in, Mr. Pettigrew?"

Joe Pettigrew just looked at him steadily. Don't answer them, he thought, and they'll start telling you. One thing they won't do — they won't stop talking. They love to hear themselves talk. He didn't speak. Waldman went on:

"Somebody called in and said he had heard a shot in this house. We thought it might have been you. We don't know who it was. The neighbors deny having heard anything."

Now is when you can make the mistake, Joe Pettigrew said in his mind. I wish I had Joseph to talk to. I feel clear in my mind. I feel okay, but these boys are not dumb. Especially the one with the soft voice and the wise eyes. Nothing less dumb ever carried a badge. Nice guy, but he won't fool. I come home and the cops have the house and somebody's called in about a gun and the front window's broken and the room's been gone over until it looks all tired out. And there's a stain there that could be blood. And those chalk marks could be the outline of a body. And Gladys isn't around and Porter Green isn't around. Well, how would I act if I didn't know anything about it? Perhaps I don't care. I guess that's it. I just don't care what these birds think. Because any time I change my mind about being here I don't have to be here. Wait a minute, though. That doesn't settle anything. It's mur-

der and suicide. It has to be, because it couldn't be anything else. I'm not going to throw that away. If it's murder and suicide, then I don't mind being here. I'm fine.

"A suicide pact," he said out loud, a little thoughtfully. "Porter Green didn't seem the type. Nor my wife — Gladys. Too shallow and too selfish."

"Nobody said anything about anybody being dead," Rehder said harshly.

That's a real cop, Joe Pettigrew thought. Like in the movies. Him I don't mind. Doesn't like anybody to have an idea or make an obvious deduction. That's a fat-headed remark he made, if ever I heard one. Out loud he said:

"How obvious does it have to get?"

Waldman smiled faintly. "Only one shot was heard, Mr. Pettigrew. If the informant heard correctly. And frankly, since we don't know the informant, we haven't been able to question him. But it was not a suicide pact. I can assure you of that. And since I have stopped being subtle — although I don't think you have — let me say at once that the radio officers found Porter Green dead where you see those marks. His chest was where you see the blood-stain. He bled very little. He was shot through the heart — quite accurately — at a distance that makes suicide very unlikely. Previous to that he had strangled your wife, after a rather violent struggle."

"He didn't know women as well as he thought he did," Joe Pettigrew said.

"This guy is shaking with excitement," Rehder put in nastily. "Just like an iron deer on somebody's front lawn."

Waldman waved his hand and kept the smile on his face. "This isn't a performance, Max," he said, without looking at his partner. "Although I know you give a very good one. Mr. Pettigrew is a very intelligent, level-headed man. We don't know too much about his home life, but we know enough to suspect that it was not happy. He pretends to no false grief. Right, Mr. Pettigrew?"

"Exact."

"I thought so. Also, not being an idiot, Max, Mr. Pettigrew knows perfectly well from the appearance of this room, from our being here, and from our manner, that something serious has happened. He may even have expected something of the sort to happen."

Joe Pettigrew shook his head. "One of her boy friends beat her up once," he said calmly. "She disappointed him. She disappointed all of them. He even wanted to beat me up."

"Why didn't he?" Waldman asked, as if the situation was the most natural thing in the world — a wife like Gladys, a husband like

Joe Pettigrew, and a roomer like Porter Green or a reasonable facsimile of Porter Green.

Joe Pettigrew smiled even more faintly than Waldman had smiled. This was something they were not going to know. His physical skills, which he seldom used, and then only at climactic moments. Something in reserve, like what was left of Professor Bingo's sample of snuff.

"Probably didn't think it worth while," he answered.

"Quite a man, ain't you, Pettigrew?" Rehder sneered. A little taste of male disgust was rising in him, like bile.

"As I said," Waldman went on peacefully, "from the appearance of things when we got here we could assume a rather violent scene. The man's face was badly scratched and the woman was badly bruised up — in addition to the usual signs of strangulation — never too pleasant to a sensitive man. Are you a sensitive man, Mr. Pettigrew? You'll have to identify her body, even if you are."

"That's the first snide remark you've made, Lieutenant."

Waldman flushed. He bit his lip. He was himself a very sensitive man. Pettigrew was right. "I'm sorry," he said and as if he meant it sincerely. "You now understand what we found here. Since you're the husband — and since so far as we know now it's uncertain when you left the house — you would normally be a suspect for one of these deaths, and possibly both."

"Both?" Joe Pettigrew asked. He showed real surprise this time, and he instantly knew it was a mistake. He tried to retrieve it. "Oh, I see what you mean. The scratches on Porter Green and the blows — on my wife's body like you said — don't prove he strangled her. I might have shot him and then strangled her — while she was unconscious or helpless from the beating."

"This guy's got no emotions at all," Rehder said with a kind of wonder.

Waldman said gently: "He has emotions, Max..But he has lived with them a long time. They are pretty deep. Right, Mr. Pettigrew?"

Joe Pettigrew said he was right. He didn't think he had quite retrieved the mistake, but he might have.

"The wound on Porter Green was definitely not a typical suicide wound," Waldman went on. "It wouldn't be, even if you picture a man coolly and quietly deciding to kill himself for what seem to him good reasons — if a suicide ever is cool and quiet. Some of them do seem to be. But a man who had just passed through a violent scene — for such a man in such a mental state to hold a gun as far from his body as he could reach

and deliberately and accurately aim it at his heart and pull the trigger — nobody could really believe that, Mr. Pettigrew. Nobody."

"So I did it," Pettigrew said and looked straight at Waldman's eyes.

Waldman stared at him and then turned to put his cigarette out in an amber glass tray. He ground it back and forth until the stub was shapeless. He spoke without looking at Pettigrew, a man thinking out loud, perfectly relaxed in his thinking.

"There are two objections to that. That is, there were. First, the windows were locked — all the windows. The door of this room was locked and although you would have a key, being the landlord — oh, by the way, I suppose you are the landlord?"

"I own the house," Pettigrew said.

"Your key would not open this door because of a dead-latch which is separate from the lock. The door into your kitchen can't be opened from the other side until a bolt on this side is turned. There's a trap door to the cellar, but it leads nowhere outside the house. We've determined that. So we thought at first that no one but himself could have killed Porter Green, because no one could have left the room after killing him and left it locked up as it *was* locked up. We found an answer to that."

Joe Pettigrew felt a slight tingling on the skin of his temples. His mouth seemed to feel dry and his tongue seemed large and stiff in it. He almost lost control. He almost said, There isn't any way. There just isn't. If there was, the whole thing would be a laugh. Professor Bingo would be a laugh. Why the hell would I stand inside the window and wait for the cop to break the glass and climb in and then right behind his back, not ten feet from him, step out onto that porch and softshoe away and away and away? Why would I bother with all that and the rest of it and the dodging people on the streets and the not having any coffee or any way to get anywhere and not being able to speak to anybody, why would I do all that if there was a way out of the room that a couple of flatfeet would find?

He didn't say it. But his saying it in his mind did something to his face. Rehder leaned forward a little further and his tongue showed its tip between his lips. Waldman sighed. Funny neither he nor Max had thought of the killer having killed both of them.

"The furnace," he said in a cool detached voice.

Pettigrew stared and slowly his head went around and he was looking at the grating of the floor furnace, the two gratings, one

horizontal and one upright where it cut into the wall between this room and the hall. "The furnace," he said and looked back at Waldman. "Why the furnace?"

"It was intended to send heat into the hall as well as this room, probably with the idea the heat would rise to the upper part of the house. Between the two parts of the furnace — that is, between the two rooms, there is a sheet-iron screen hanging on a rod. It is intended to divert the heat where you want it. It will blank either of the upright gratings and put most of the heat into one outlet, or if it hangs straight up and down as we found it, the heat goes in both directions."

"A man could get through that?" Pettigrew asked wonderingly.

"Not every man. You could. The screen moves easily. We've tried it. One of our technical men went through. The available space is about twelve by twenty inches. Ample for you, Mr. Pettigrew."

"So I killed them and got out that way," Joe Pettigrew said. "I'm brilliant. Really brilliant. And put the gratings back afterwards."

"Nothing to that. They are not screwed down, just held in position by their weight. We tried it, Mr. Pettigrew. We know." He rumpled his dark wavy hair. "Unfortunately that's not a complete solution."

"No?" A pulse was beating in Joe Pettigrew's temple. A hard little angry hammer of a pulse. He was tired. The long accumulated tiredness of many small tirednesses. Yes, he was very tired now. He put his hand in his pocket and felt the crumpled box of snuff wrapped in the paper towel.

Both the detectives tensed. Rehder's hand went to his hip. He leaned his weight forward on his feet.

"Just snuff," Joe Pettigrew said.

Waldman stood up. "I'll take that," he said sharply, and stood over Joe Pettigrew.

"Just snuff. Quite harmless." Joe Pettigrew opened the package and dropped the piece of paper towel on the floor. He lifted off the crumpled lid of the box. He touched his finger to the spoonful of white powder that was all that was left. Two good pinches, no more. Two reprieves.

He turned his hand and emptied the powder on to the floor.

"I never saw snuff that color," Waldman said. He took the emptied box. The writing on the smashed cover was blurred with dirt. It could be read, but not quickly.

"It's snuff all right," Joe Pettigrew said. "It's not poison. At least not the kind you're thinking of. I don't want it any more. What's the rest of your analysis,

Lieutenant? There must be more."

Waldman moved back and away from him, but he didn't sit down again.

"The other objection to the idea of murder is that there was no point in it — if it was Green that strangled your wife. Until you mentioned it, I hadn't thought of anything else. That makes you a reasonably sharp man, Mr. Pettigrew. If the finger marks on her throat — which are very clear and will be clearer still — come from your hands, there's no more to say."

"They didn't," Joe Pettigrew said. He held his hands out, palms up. "You ought to be able to tell. Porter Green's hands are twice as big as mine."

"If that is so, Mr. Pettigrew," and Waldman's voice began to rise in tone and volume as he spoke, "and your wife was already dead and you shot Porter Green, not only was it silly of you to run away and make an anonymous telephone call, because even if this could have been a deliberate murder on your part, no jury would convict you of as much as manslaughter — you had a perfect defense — self-defense —" Waldman was now speaking very loudly and clearly, although not shouting, and Rehder was watching him with a reluctant admiration. "If you had simply picked up the telephone and called the police and said you shot him because you had heard a scream and had come downstairs with a gun and this man was half-naked and had blood all over his face from the scratches and he had rushed at you and you —" Waldman's voice faded, "shot at him, by pure instinct," he ended quietly. "Anybody would believe that," he said softly.

"I didn't see the scratches until after I shot him," Joe Pettigrew said.

A dead silence fell into the room. Waldman stood with his mouth open, the final words hanging on his lips. Rehder laughed. He reached his hand back again and took the gun from his hip holster.

"I was ashamed," Joe Pettigrew said. "Ashamed to look at his face. Ashamed for him. You wouldn't understand. You hadn't lived with her."

Waldman stood silent, his chin down, his eyes brooding. He moved forward. "I'm afraid that's all, Mr. Pettigrew," he said quietly. "It's been interesting, and a little painful. Now we'll go where we have to go."

Joe Pettigrew laughed sharply. Just for a moment Waldman masked Rehder with his body. Joe Pettigrew went sideways out of the chair and seemed to twist in midair like a dropped cat. He was in the doorway.

Rehder yelled at him to stop.

Then, too quickly, he fired. The shot knocked Joe Pettigrew clear across the hall. He hit the far wall, flopped his arms, and half-turned. He sat down with his back against the wall, and his mouth and eyes open.

"Some boy," Rehder said, walking stiff-legged out past Waldman. "Betcha he did them both in, Lieutenant."

He bent down, then straightened and turned, putting his gun away. "No ambulance," he said tersely. "Not that I meant it that way. You made it tough for me."

Waldman stood in the doorway. He lit another cigarette. His hand shook a little. He looked at it waving the match out.

"Ever occur to you that he might be perfectly innocent after all?"

"Not a chance, Lieutenant. Not a shadow. I've seen too many."

"Too many of something," Waldman said distantly. His dark eyes were cold and angry. "You saw me frisk him. You knew he was not armed. How far could he have run? So you killed him — because you like to show off. For no other reason."

He went past Rehder into the hall and bent down over Joe Pettigrew. He put a hand inside his jacket and felt his heart. He straightened and turned.

Rehder was sweating. His eyes were narrow and his whole face looked unnatural. He still had the gun in his hand.

"I didn't see you frisk him," he said thickly.

"So you think I'm a damn fool," Waldman said coldly. "Even if you're not lying — and you *are* lying."

"You rank me," Rehder said with a harsh rustle in his voice, "but you can't call me a liar, bud." He lifted the gun a little. Waldman's lip curled with contempt. He didn't say anything. After a moment, slowly, Rehder swung the gate of his gun out and blew through the barrel, and then put the gun away. "I made a mistake," he said, in a strained voice. "You tell it any way you like. And you better get you another partner. Yeah — I shot too quick. And the guy could of been innocent like you say. Crazy, anyway. Most they'd have done would be to commit him. Say a year, nine months. And he comes out to a happy life without Gladys. I spoiled all that."

Waldman said almost gently, "Crazy in a sense, no doubt. But he meant to kill both of them. The whole setup points to that. We both know it. And he didn't get out through the floor furnace."

"Huh," Rehder's eyes jumped and his mouth fell open.

"I was watching him when I told him about it. That, Max, was the only thing we told him that really surprised him."

"He had to. No other way."

Waldman nodded, then shrugged. "Say we haven't found any other way — and we don't have to now. I'll call in."

He went past Rehder into the living room and sat down at the telephone.

The front door bell rang. Rehder looked down at Joe Pettigrew and then at the door. He stepped softly along the hall. He stepped to the door and opened it about six inches, holding it that way. He looked out at a tall angular wasted-looking man who wore a top hat and an opera cloak, although Rehder didn't know exactly what an opera cloak was. The man was pale and had deepset black eyes. He took the hat off and bowed a little.

"Mr. Pettigrew?"

"He's busy. Who wants him?"

"I left him a small sample of a new kind of snuff this morning. I wondered if he liked it."

"He don't want no snuff," Rehder said. Funny-looking bird. Where did they dig them up? Better test that powder for coke, maybe.

"Well, if he does, he knows where to reach me," Professor Bingo said politely. "Good afternoon to you." He touched the brim of the hat, and turned away. He walked slowly, with great dignity. When he had taken three steps Rehder said in his harsh cop voice, which he didn't use as much as he had once: "Come here a minute, Doc. We might want to talk to you about that snuff. It don't look like no snuff to me."

Professor Bingo stopped and turned. His arms were under his opera cloak now. "And just who are you?" he asked Rehder with detached insolence.

"Police officer. There's been a homicide in this house. It could be that snuff —"

Professor Bingo smiled. "My business is with Mr. Pettigrew, Officer."

"You come back here!" Rehder barked, jerking the door wide. Professor Bingo looked into the hall. He pursed his lips. Otherwise he didn't move.

"Why that looks like Mr. Pettigrew on the floor," he said. "Is he ill?"

"Worse. He's dead. And like I said. You come back here!"

Professor Bingo took a hand out from under his cloak. There was no weapon in it. Rehder had made a motion towards his hip. He relaxed and let his hand drop.

"Dead, eh?" Professor Bingo smiled almost gaily. "Well, you mustn't let that disturb you, Officer. I presume someone shot him as he tried to escape?"

"Come here, you!" Rehder started down the steps.

Professor Bingo waved a long white left hand. "Poor Mr. Pettigrew, he has really been dead for all of ten years. He just didn't

know it, Officer."

Rehder was at the bottom of the steps now. His hand was itching to go for his gun again. Something in Professor Bingo's eyes made him feel cold all over.

"I imagine you had quite a problem in there," Professor Bingo said politely. "Quite a problem. But it's very simple really."

His right hand came delicately out from under his cloak. His thumb and forefinger were pressed together. They went up towards his face.

Professor Bingo took a pinch of snuff.

6 and 10 are Johnny

(Continued from page 39)

"It seems too damn easy," Rod grunted.

"Why?"

"Well — there's nothing more ruthless, or cleverer, than a man that's obsessed with knowledge. And that goes for a jungle too. The thirst to know can be worse than any other type of obsession."

Jeffers glanced over his shoulder at the two sleepers and chuckled. "Well, at least she returns the books she borrows."

"I wonder," murmured Esperson as the ship burst through the cloud layer on its upward streak for space.

The jungle steamed and dripped. The jungle hissed and suckled and belched. It captured a new insect, took it apart, and made a replica to lure others just like it. And the replica was devoted to its mother, who used it. The jungle writhed and danced and grew. The jungle waited, feeling a sensual glow. Some insects were more interesting than others, and she hated to let them go. But by parting with two, she would soon gain seventy more — and by spending the seventy . . .

The jungle gleefully counted her gains. And there was a place called Earth. . . .

The Runaway

(Continued from page 75)

out here. Why blame the railroad?"

"But his body was crushed — *crushed* — everything — even his watch was smashed. You could tell what time it happened by his watch. It was stopped at twelve-o-five. It was the twelve-o-five train, it must have been!"

"I don't know nothing about no watch, lady," the stationmaster said. "All I know is, it couldn't of been our train, because there ain't no twelve-o-five goes through this station." He reached in his desk drawer, drew out a yellowed timetable. "Look at this, lady — last time we had a twelve-o-five in August was twenty years ago."

Full Circle

(Continued from page 63)

And the machines roared and thundered and rumbled, and the sound was like the day of Creation.

And in Control there was no noise but equal activity. Here a green light indicated what a worker could not see, that Press X-B was rolling the surfacing too thin by a molecule layer. There an orange glow indicated a drop of a millionth of a degree in the temperature of Vat Q-9.

The words went out from Control. "Worker RR-7, up a millionth. Worker V-2, pressure up a micro-volt."

For nothing must go wrong. The '63 model must be perfection.

And in Distribution there was the clatter of smaller machines and the sound of words and words and words. The news must go out. Through all possible channels the news of the '63 model must be distributed.

Everyone must know so that everyone might be prepared.

AT LAST! MODEL '63!

SEE IT! HEAR IT! TEST IT! NO HOME COMPLETE WITHOUT ONE!

So the news went out. For the first time, within the reach of all!

Perfection.

The '63 model. Perfection. The ultimate. Able to do anything and everything better than it had ever been done before. Perfection.

Self-servicing, self-fueling, self-directing!

Unbelievable, but true! No machine, no robot even, could do what the '63 model could do.

Out of the thunder of Production and the precision of Control and the Channels of Distribution the '63 model came. By the hundreds, the thousands, the millions, they poured out and were tested and lined up and carted away.

And to the showrooms of the world the robots came, in the year 20,362, to stand alone and in groups with their great metal bodies gleaming and their metallic voices hushed, to see the product of the Factory, the '63 model.

Unbelievable that skin so thin and soft could be so durable, that eyes so weak and watery could see so well, that a brain of such inferior materials could function.

But there it was, the '63 model, the Humanoid, and it postured and walked and talked, was truly everything it was claimed to be.

And the signs told the most unbelievable thing of all: that the '63 model could reproduce itself!

By the millions the robots came and saw and marveled at this thing that Robot had made. By the millions they took away with them the '63 model and wondered afresh at the genius of Robot.

But a few, seeing what Robot had created, felt a touch of fear.

And Three To Get Ready . . .

(Continued from page 105)

Merriman had died, but he threw out the idea that the little guy had done it.

Matter of fact, he had the cops put the arm on him and said, "Arnold Roach, I arrest you for complicity in the murder—" And so forth and so on.

The little guy, whose name turned out to be what Warren said, had been unlucky enough to leave some fingerprints around. They had him, sure enough, except that he stuck to this whammy story and hired a good psychiatrist, who got him an insanity plea. So we have him back in the ward here. And if you think he's given up and started mentioning people's names even once, let alone three times, you're battier than he is. He screams whenever somebody mentions *any* name. It's a hell of a job remembering not to call the patients by name when he's around. "Look, what do you think?" I asked Dr. Schatz. "Is the guy psychotic or did he cop a lucky plea?"

Dr. Schatz ran his hand across his mouth and talked through his fingers. "I think he's psychotic. There's never any proof of that, of course, but his behavior bears me out. It's definitely psychotic."

"And what about this story of his about saying names three times? All right, maybe he made up those items before he showed up here—after all, they were dead already and nobody could say he had or hadn't said their names three times before they died. And Michaels—the little guy helped him shuffle out with a razor across the throat. But what about Dr. Merriman?"

"I've already told you," Schatz said tiredly. "Cardiac lesion and hypothetical death wish triggered by suggestion."

I put the mop back in the bucket and began wringing it after a fast swab at the floor. I didn't feel happy and I showed it.

"That's a guess," I answered. "What if the little guy is right and people *do* die when he says their names three times?"

"Why don't you try it and see?" he asked.

I almost upset the pail. "Me? You're the psychiatrist. Why don't you?"

"Because I know it's purely a childish delusion. I don't need any proof."

"That," I said, leaning on the mop, "is not a scientific attitude, Doctor."

"The devil with it," he grunted in annoyance. "If it's bothering you that much, I'll do it."

But he always seems to have something else to do whenever I remind him.

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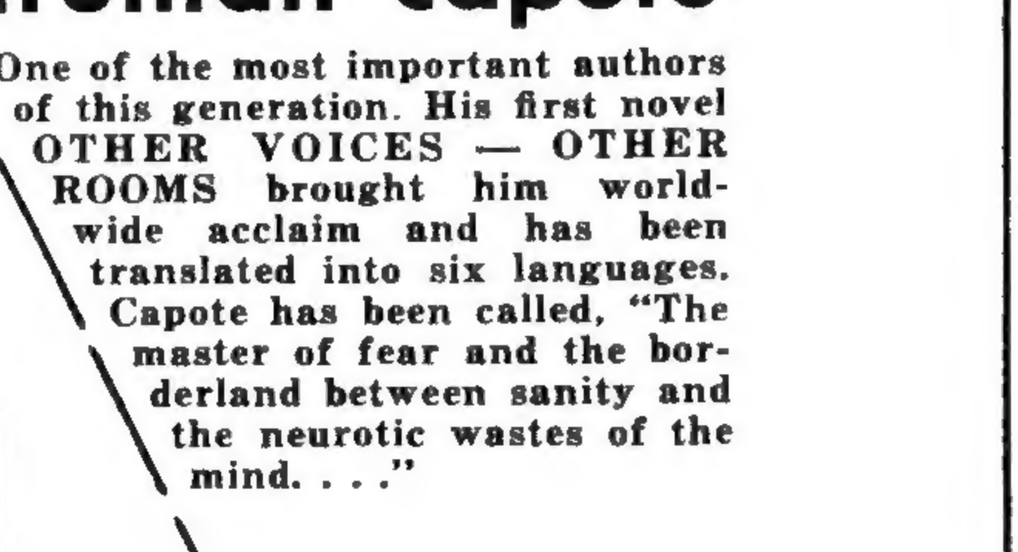

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